

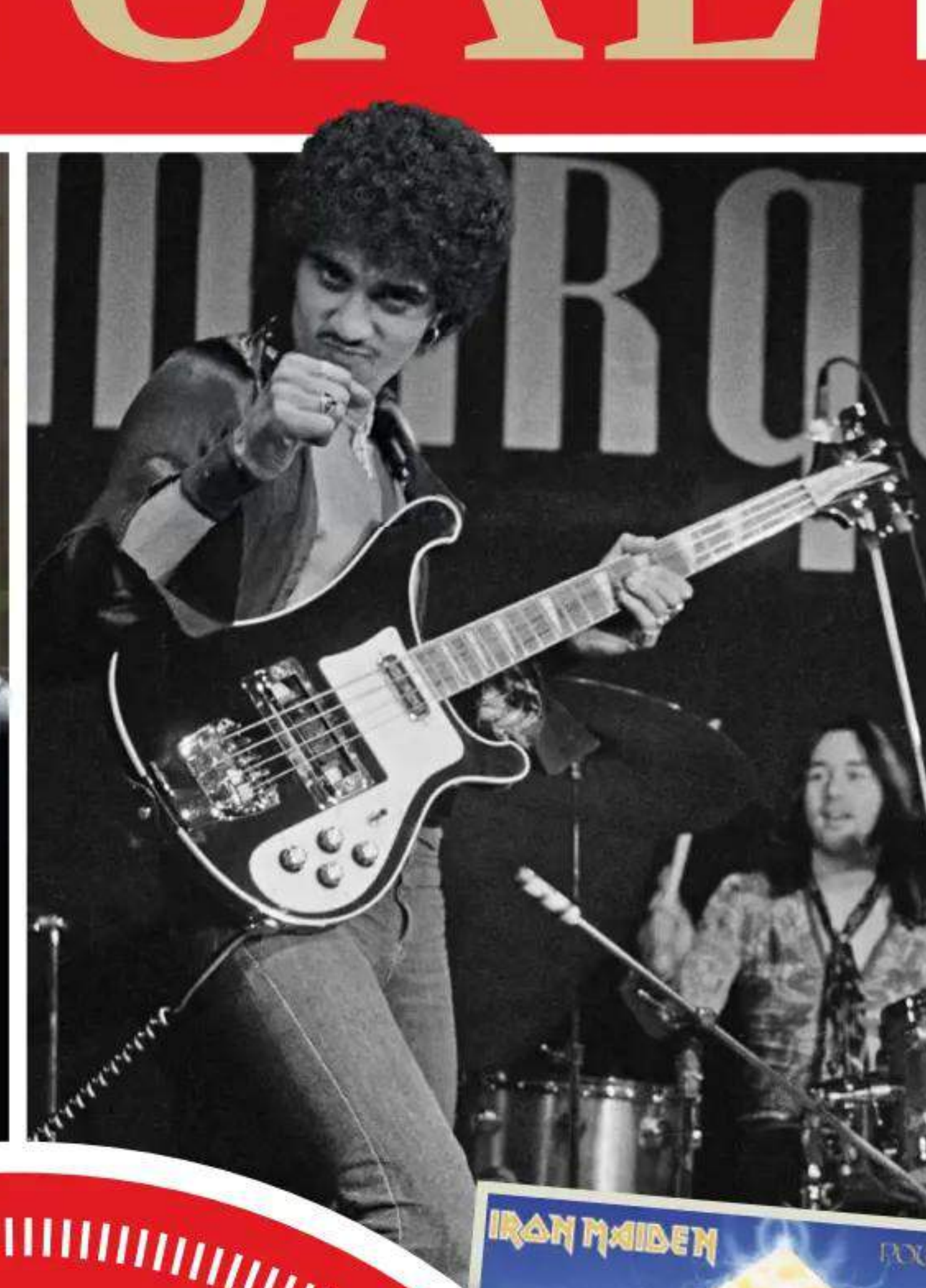
THE BEST OF BRITAIN'S BEST ROCK MAGAZINE

★ CLASSIC ★

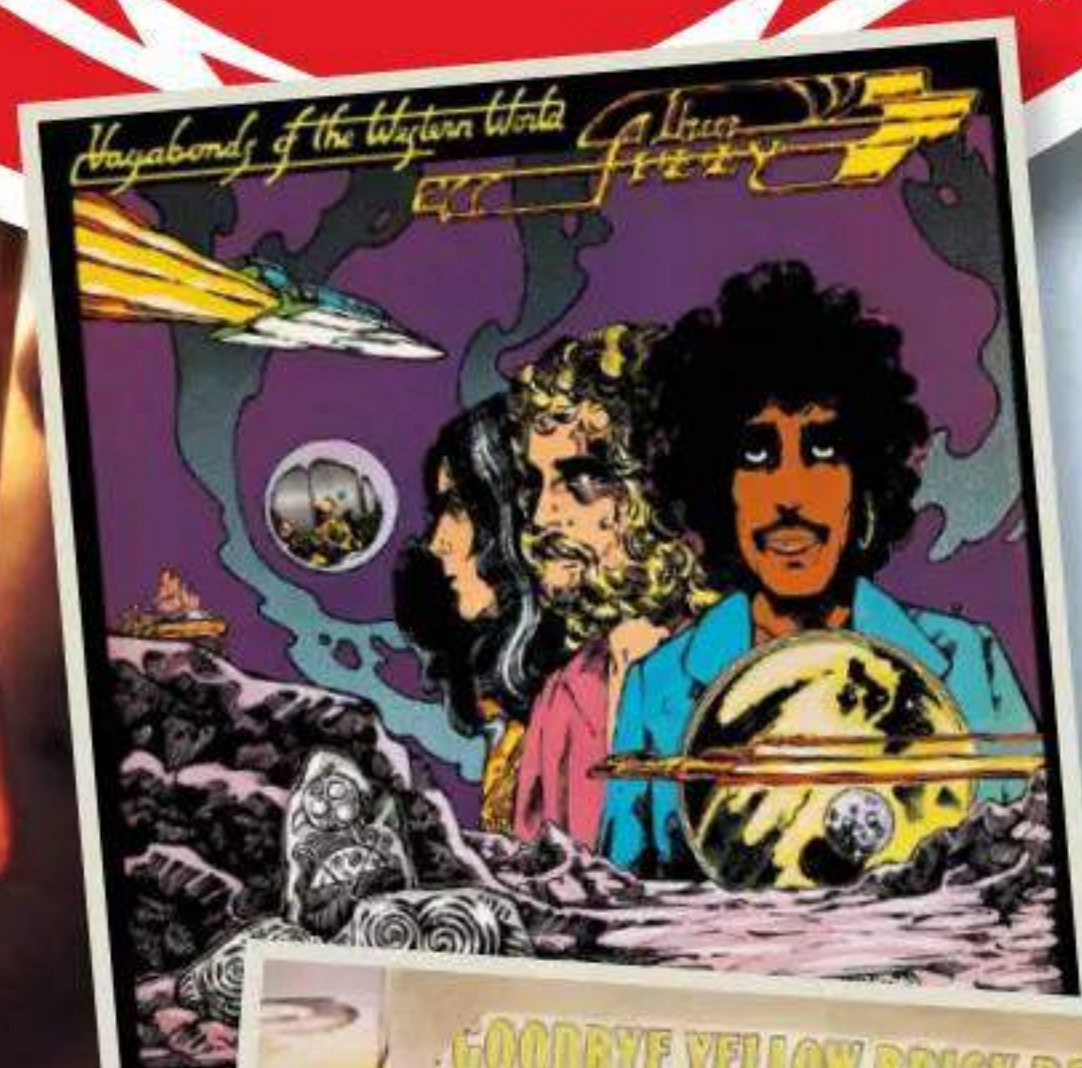
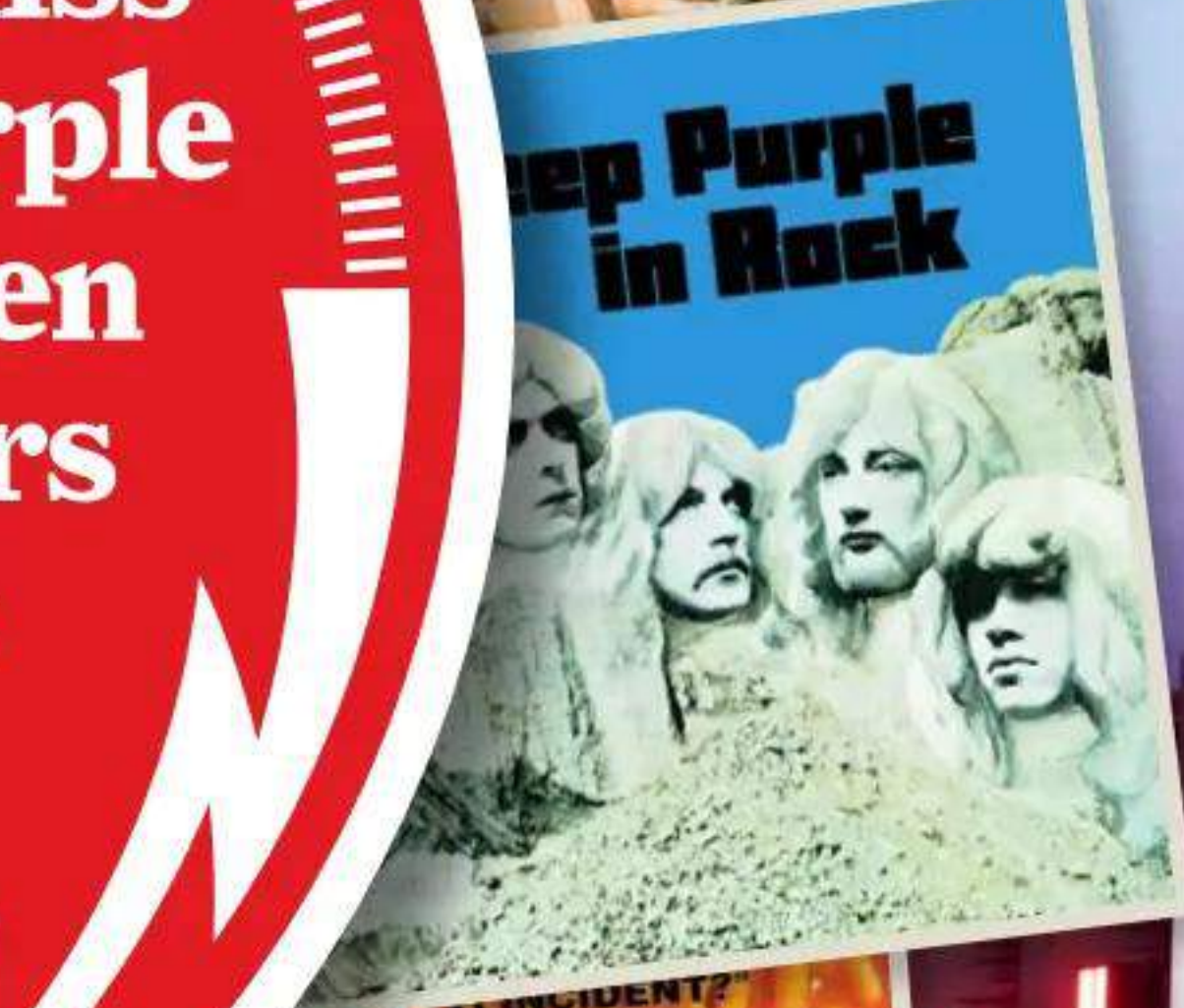
ROCK

THE ANNUAL

12 MONTHS OF
HIGH-VOLTAGE
ROCK'N'ROLL



Starring
Guns N' Roses
Queen ★ Elton John
The Black Crowes ★ Kiss
Pink Floyd ★ Deep Purple
Bon Jovi ★ Iron Maiden
AC/DC ★ Paul Rodgers
Thin Lizzy ★ Heart
Black Sabbath
Sheryl Crow
& More!



Digital
Edition

FUTURE

VOLUME 8

★CLASSIC★ Rock THE ANNUAL

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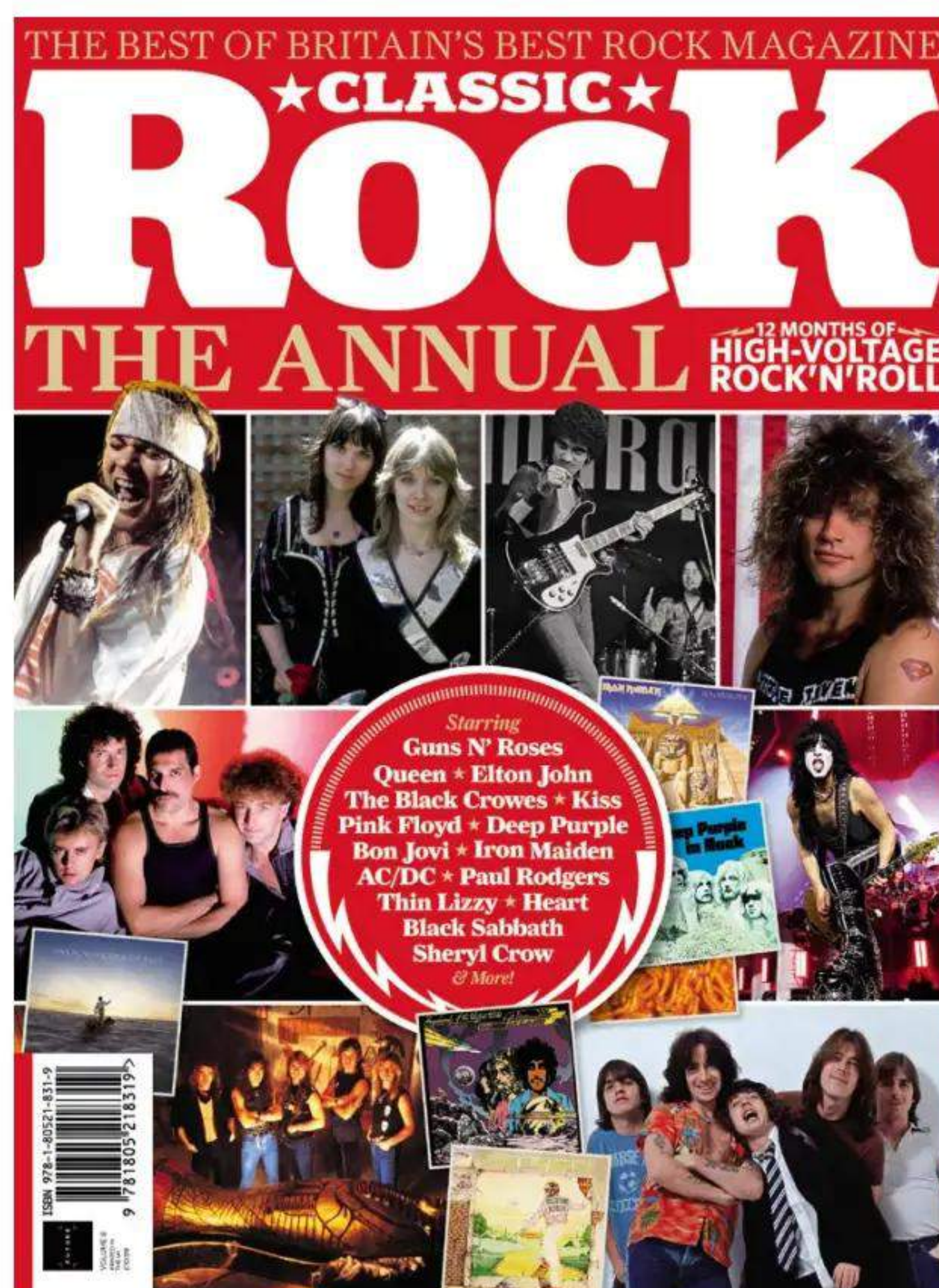
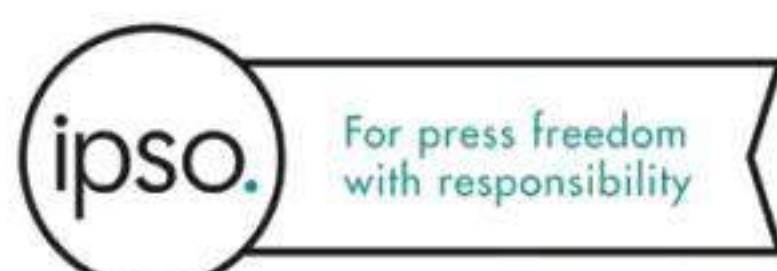
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★CLASSIC★ Rock

bookazine series



Can you believe that a year has passed since we released our previous edition of *Classic Rock* magazine's annual 'Best Of'? I certainly can't! But pass it has and I'm happy to report that it's been another terrific year of bringing you tales of triumphant high-voltage rock'n'roll. Welcome, then, to our 'Best Of' Volume 8 – and no, I can't believe it's our eighth edition either – our chance to bring you some of the greatest stories that we ran in the magazine over the past year.

We've got the inside stories on the making of classic albums such as Queen's *The Game*, Elton John's *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*, Guns N' Roses' *The Spaghetti Incident*, Thin Lizzy's *Vagabonds Of The Western World*, Pink Floyd's *The Endless River* and Iron Maiden's *Powerslave*... We sat down with The Black Crowes' Robinson brothers, Heart's Wilson sisters, Paul Rodgers, Jon Bon Jovi, Sheryl Crow and more for the in-depth Classic Rock Interview. We talked to the stars about AC/DC's amazing 50-year (and counting) legacy; discussed Deep Purple's greatest songs with a star-studded roster and the band themselves and so much more...

I hope you enjoy reading these stories and more over the next 140 pages as much as we did putting them together. Until next year, then...

Siân Llewellyn,
Editor, Classic Rock





MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

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THE LONG KISS GOODNIGHT

It's been coming for a while, but the final show of the final tour by rock icons **Kiss** finally arrived. And *Classic Rock* was there to talk to Gene and Paul about the enormity of it all, wallow in the end-of-an-era atmosphere and, yes, rock and roll all (one final) night.

Words: **Paul Brannigan**





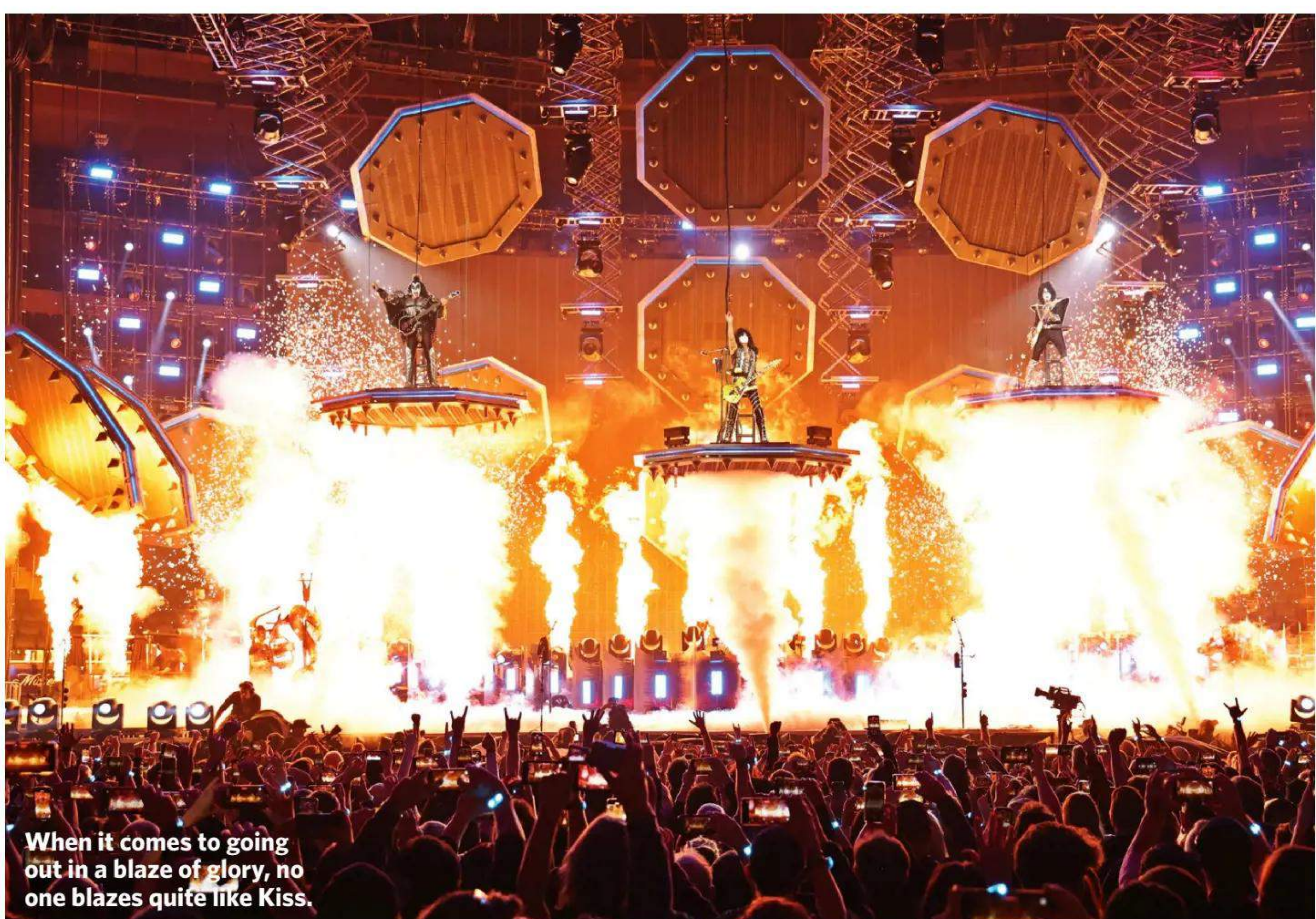
At Madison Square Garden, Paul Stanley and (right) Gene Simmons head to the stage for the very last time.



It started not with a bang, but with a whimper. As bassist Gene Simmons remembers it, there were “more people on stage than in the audience” on January 30, 1973 when Kiss played their first New York show, at a club called Coventry on Queens Boulevard and 47th Street in Queens. But, having initially bonded over a shared vision to be “the band we never saw on stage... The Beatles on steroids”, the four young musicians were determined to seize their moment, and had prepped accordingly. At the group’s Manhattan rehearsal space on 10 East 23rd Street – “a rat-infested fire trap”, an unsentimental Simmons remembers it – vocalist/guitarist Paul Stanley and drummer Peter Criss had sewn eye-catching ‘glitter pants’ stage costumes for the four band members, and Simmons and Stanley later ducked into a local ‘adult emporium’ to purchase studded BDSM collars to complete their glam-rock street-gang look. As a final touch, lead guitarist Ace Frehley, who had only recently, and somewhat reluctantly, accepted that his desire to name the band Fuck could potentially prove problematic down the line, sketched out a new logo for the group, later refined by Stanley. And then, says Simmons, “we were ready”.

“We were four dysfunctional characters who had nothing in common,” he admitted to this writer in 2014, “but when we first made that joyful noise together, we knew this is Kiss, this is it. That first gig was special. It was an amazing moment to actually hear our songs, and see our whole creation take its first breaths. The fact that there was nobody in the room is a moot point. We were on our way.”

On the opening weekend of December 2023, almost 51 years on from their band’s debut gig, Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley are back home, to finish what they started, and call time on their extraordinary shared adventures. Since the announcement in March that the current four-piece – completed by guitarist Tommy Thayer and drummer Eric Singer – would wrap their epic and eventful End Of The Road tour in New York with a brace of shows at Madison Square Garden, the most iconic, storied venue in Gotham, anticipation had been building steadily for this climactic weekend. While Kiss’s debut bow in the five boroughs back in 1973 was



When it comes to going out in a blaze of glory, no one blazes quite like Kiss.

“We sweat real sweat. We work real hard. And when we get up on stage, every time, we have a take-no-prisoners attitude.”

Gene Simmons

met with the only emotional response worse than hatred – complete apathy – it’s fair to say that, five decades on, their 47th and 48th shows in their home town (if Paul Stanley’s maths skills are to be trusted), have officially been recognised as Kinda A Big Deal.

Simmons may be many things, but he is seldom a liar, and his promise, on the weekend before Kiss were scheduled to kiss our world goodbye, that it would be impossible to escape Kiss on their hometown victory lap in NYC, is borne out from the moment that this writer exits Penn Station clutching one of the 50,000 Kiss-themed metro cards issued to commemorate their final hometown performances.

Twenty-four hours earlier, in recognition of their unique contribution to the city’s cultural tapestry, Mayor Eric Adams officially designated November 30 as Kiss Day, and that same evening the also iconic Empire State Building was illuminated with the Kiss logo, group photos, and a bespoke music-to-light show synced to the band’s 1975 single *Rock And Roll All Nite*. Foot soldiers from the mighty Kiss Army converging on the city over the course of the NYC Takeover weekend would also be given the opportunity to visit a Kiss pop-up merch store, to ride in Kiss-branded yellow taxis, to acquire free Kiss ‘flash’ tattoos, and to feast on Kiss-themed pizzas. “Fabulous, right?” Simmons says with



**“I want to be able to walk away
while we’re at our peak.”**

Paul Stanley





Eric Singer: "Hooray! No more make-up!"



"So what do we do now?" Doc McGhee (left) and Danny Francis of Kiss's management.



Family ties: Paul Stanley's son Evan (right, from support act Amber Wild) with the final show's set-lists.

a smile. "To see this little band that you started in ten blocks away from Madison Square Garden suddenly own the city like this for a weekend is quite remarkable. But while that's all great for our egos, all the bullshit stops and means nothing when it's time to get up on stage. We sweat real sweat. We work real hard. And when we get up on stage, every time, we have a take-no-prisoners attitude, because the show and the fans are, after all, what this is really all about."

Talking to *Classic Rock* on what was supposed to be a day free from any band business a week out from their homecoming weekend, the 74-year-old bassist is as forthright, amusing and engaging as ever. At one point he cheerfully slips into the bullish persona for which he's best known – "On stage he's The Demon, he shits fire and eats kids; off stage he's arrogant and self-absorbed, a businessman who only cares about money and fucking chicks," he once told me with

a wink, in a knowing, mocking reference to the reputation that precedes him – by shooting down the suggestion that this will be his final *Classic Rock* cover story interview, interrupting to say: "We'll be back on the cover, whether for a retrospective or whatever, because you're still going to want to sell copies, aren't you?"

"We were four dysfunctional characters... but when we first made that joyful noise together, we knew this is Kiss, this is it."

Gene Simmons

He then shares a rather sweet human story which, to him, illustrates perfectly the strength of the connection between Kiss and their fans. "I tend to exaggerate, often, as you know, but this is a true story," he says by way of an introduction. "So, the context is that I have these handmade, high-end, very expensive instruments that I sell

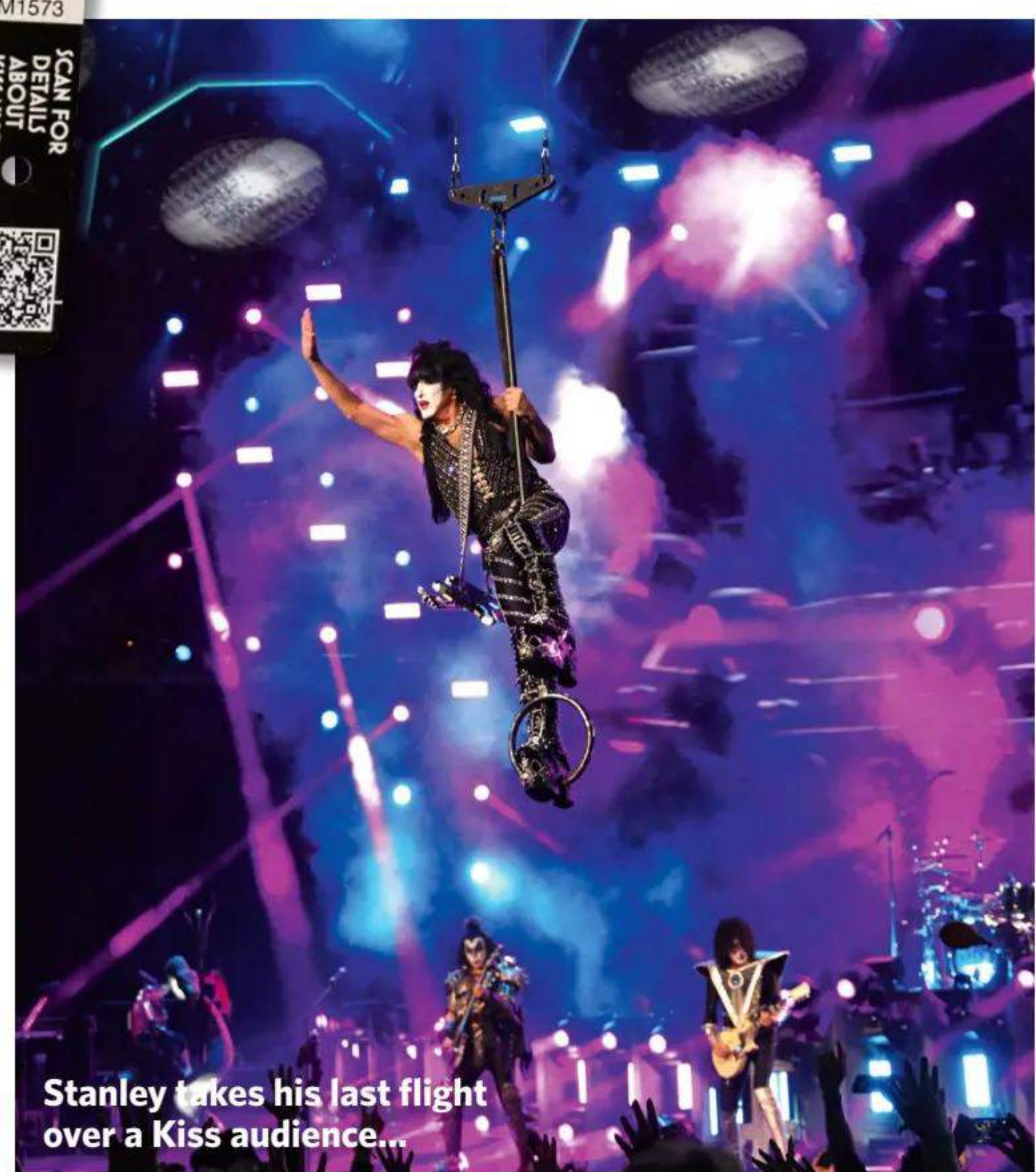
– like, say, a bass costing twenty-five thousand dollars – and fans gobble them up, so I'll sign them too. So there was a couple that drove in today from, I believe, Kansas City via Nashville, all the way to Indianapolis, to collect the bass the guy had bought. And he came in and he was wearing a sleeveless T-shirt and sweatpants, and his girlfriend was

dressed exactly the same. So, joking around, I said: 'Hey, thanks for dressing up!'"

"Then he told me the whole story, which was that he had blacked out at the wheel of their car after driving for eight hours, and the car was completely totalled, and they had come here directly from the hospital. The doctors wanted them to stay in the hospital because they'd been in this very bad car wreck. But they refused and said: 'No, we gotta get out of here.' And they got an Uber to where I was meeting the fans to sign their basses. He had some credit cards, and some cash on him, and that was it. No clothing, no personal belongings, not



Holding back the tears?
Simmons and Stanley soak
up the end-of-it-all vibes.



Stanley takes his last flight
over a Kiss audience...



...and Tommy Thayer fires
his last Kiss rocket.

even their toothbrushes. But he didn't want to miss out on meeting me, even though he'd passed out on the way here. The least I could do was put them up in this hotel, and get them some nice food, because they had nowhere to stay. That was kind? I mean, come on. They risked their lives just to come over and meet me, so what am I going to say? 'Hey, thanks a lot, have a nice eight-hour drive back home?' We're blessed to have the fans we have, and we never forget that, for without them, my interactions with people could be reduced to: 'Do you want fries with that?'

When talk turns to the emotional impact that the conclusion of The End Of The Road tour might levy on Simmons, not least because those lifelong bonds will likely weaken, he starts to reel off a stock, super-sized Demon soundbite about the physical effort required to perform nightly in his seven-inch dragon boots and "forty pounds of armour", and then pauses, and begins again, offering a more human, emotional reply.

"You know, sitting here on my bed in my fancy hotel room, with all the trappings that go along with fame and fortune, it's easy to be glib, but

that's not the same as actually feeling it," he admits. "I know that I'll be proud and excited standing on that stage for that very last time, but I'm also reasonably sure I'm gonna cry on stage like a twelve-year-old girl who's been dumped by her first boyfriend. They used to call me Mr. Spock when I was a kid, because I didn't get as emotional

**"The band deserves to live
on because the band is
bigger than we are."**

Paul Stanley

as others, I was always pretty buttoned-up and straightforward in matters of the heart. But in the past weeks, when I've caught sight of a five-year-old child dressed like me, in my make-up, sitting on the shoulders of their father, who's also dressed like me, and I see that kid stick his tongue out at me, copying me? More than once recently, I'll

admit, I've had to turn my back, because, you know, the big man is not supposed to cry. How am I going to react on December two? You'll be there, you can see for yourself when the time comes.

"But, you know, this isn't just about me, or Paul, or Tommy and Eric," he adds. "We've always said that Kiss is bigger than us, that this is a world we've created in partnership with our fans. When you go to that last concert, you're gonna see people of all ages, all nationalities, all races, kids, models, rock stars, business people. Because who doesn't want to go out on the fourth of July? Who doesn't want to go to the circus? So don't you worry too much about the Big Bad Wolf here shedding a tear. Come see the big picture, because this doesn't end when we walk off the Madison Square Garden stage on night two."

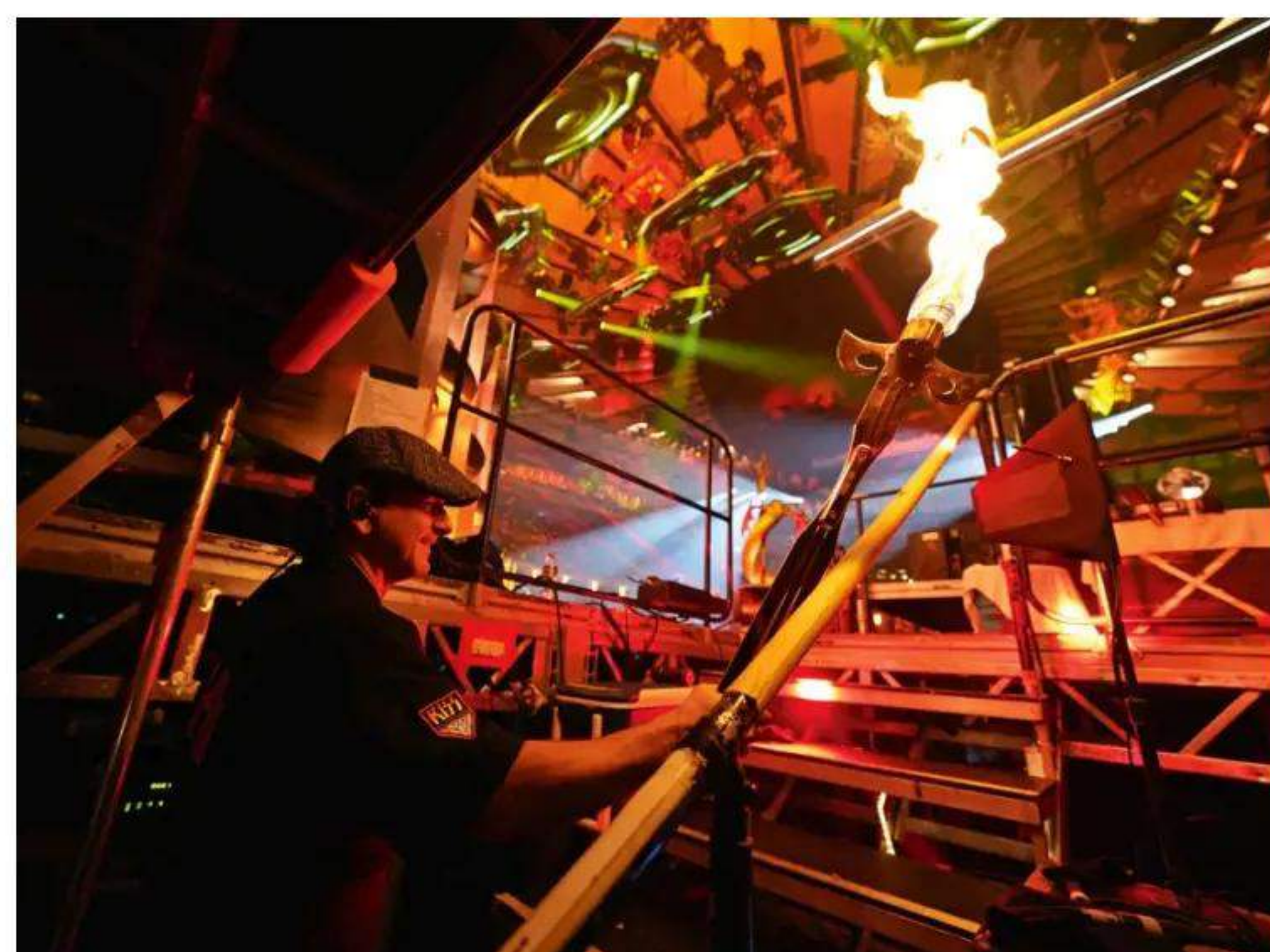
Walking around Madison Square Garden on the afternoon of December 2, the truth of Simmons's words is all too evident, as the Kiss Army annex Manhattan in a bloodless, good-natured coup. There are literally hundreds of face-painted cosplay Demons and Starchildren of all ages roaming the streets, posing for tourist photos, ➤



Loving it loud:
Tommy Thayer



It's all over – this time for
good – for the Kiss crew.



throwing 'the horns' and wagging their tongue enthusiastically at passing pedestrians, to the bemusement and amusement of all but the most stone-hearted sults. In a city which, for better or worse, has been sanitised and 'Disney-fied' to an extent which makes it utterly unrecognisable to the environment that spawned Kiss – in the summer of 1975, tourists arriving at New York's airports were met by off-duty police officers handing out 'Survival Guide' pamphlets featuring a hooded skull beneath the words 'WELCOME TO FEAR CITY' – the carnival atmosphere feels both anarchic and wholesome all at once.

In their midst of all this good-natured chaos stands a lone dissenting voice, a middle-aged man sporting rudimentary Kiss-style face paint, holding a homemade placard with the message: 'Turn to Jesus or Burn in Hell'. Whether the gentleman in question is buying into the age-old myth that Kiss are indeed Knights In Satan's Service, or simply considers their stated aim to rock'n'roll all night

and party every day irresponsible and an affront to the puritan work ethic that helped shape modern America, is not clear. But if his intention showing up here today is to steer Simmons and Stanley out of the darkness, we fear he may have got here approximately 50 years and 10 months too late. Still, they say God loves a trier.

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**“Without them [fans], my interactions  
 with people could be reduced to:  
 ‘Do you want fries with that?’”**

**Gene Simmons**

**A**s Paul Stanley is ferried discreetly from the luxurious five-star midtown hotel in which Kiss and their nearest and dearest have taken temporary residence, into the bowels of Madison Square Garden, his proximity to thousands of fans sporting his likeness on T-shirts and jackets goes completely unnoticed. But the

energy and excitement radiating from those soaking in the pre-gig atmosphere is not lost on Kiss's 71-year-old vocalist/guitarist, evoking warm memories of his own teenage music fandom.

"I slept outside a department store here so that I could get tickets to see George Harrison's Concert For Bangladesh here," he says, smiling as he mentally revisits the summer of 1971. "I saw the Rolling Stones here, with the Ike & Tina Turner Revue. The Garden, to me, was the palace of greatness. And so for us to be ending everything here, in New York City, is incredible, such a milestone, and a magical full-circle experience.

"I told the story before, but as a cab driver I once drove a couple to Madison Square Garden to see Elvis Presley, and all I could think about was that some day people will come here to see me and my band. So to return one last time, to where we made our first giant step into real-world prominence, is incredible. We've gone on to play bigger places, sure. But in the same way that our first Gold album meant ➤



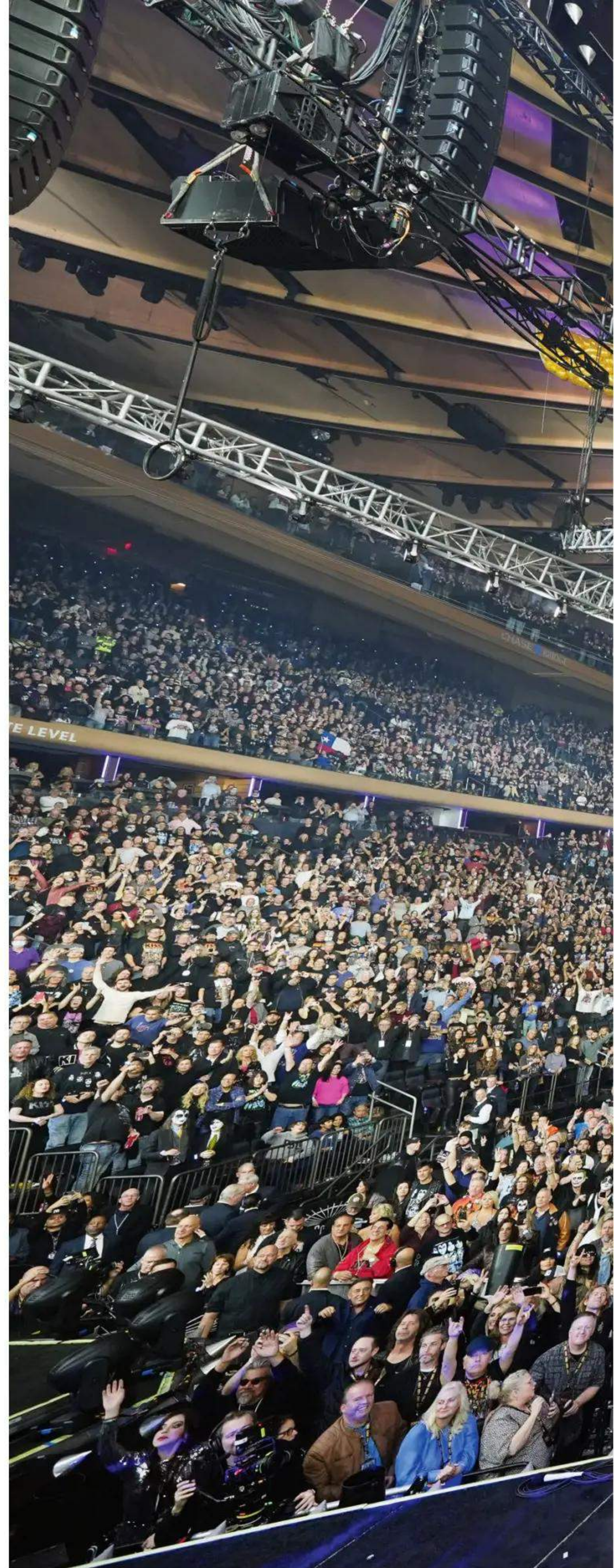
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**“This doesn’t end when we walk
off the Madison Square Garden
stage on night two.”**

• Gene Simmons





Young, middle-aged and old turned up to experience the end of an era.



see Gene's mom. It's funny, no matter how old we are, or who you are, we're all always reduced in some way to being children who want our parents' acknowledgement and approval. But I think we did okay then, and I think we'll do okay now.

"So much has happened during this tour that has really just reaffirmed for me that our decision to pull the plug now is a good one," Stanley adds quietly. "Making the right decision doesn't mean that it's easy, or less painful. To see people I cared about and love die [Stanley doesn't specifically name Fran Stueber, his guitar tech of 20 years, who tragically passed away after contracting covid in October '21, but that loss is surely on his mind] only points out once again how precarious life is and how finite it is. And I want to be able to walk away while we're at our peak. I know that everyone has their own special memories but, honestly, I've never seen this band play better night after night, and the response we've had on this tour is everything I ever hoped for, and more."

KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY X2

“Having so many people thank me for what we’ve given them honestly made me teary-eyed.”

Paul Stanley

more to me than our first Platinum album, this was the touchstone that I aspired to, and the band aspired to. So to say our final, final goodbye here is a true privilege.”

A more sensitive, emotional character than Simmons, on a surface reading at least – “Paul is the soul of Kiss, and I’m the cock,” Simmons once informed me – Stanley freely admits today that, as The End Of The Road tour has inched ever closer to its conclusion, it has stirred up a wealth of conflicting emotions. “To talk about the end conceptually is one thing, to see the end imminent is another,” he told me in February 2023, adding: “The emotional impact is not lost on me.”

With the intensity of the day ratcheting ever higher as the hours and minutes to show time ebb away, he’s impressively Zen, but obviously not immune to the heightened, if controlled, tensions around this climactic day.

“Look, there’s no getting around the fact that there’s a huge amount of emotion involved,” he acknowledges. “In the past week, having so many people personally come over to me to thank me for what we’ve given them honestly made me teary-eyed. Not least because it works both ways: I tell everybody that whatever we did for them, they did for us too, with the incredible lives they’ve made possible for us, and the experiences that we’ve had. It’s humbling, and very touching to think of the journey we’ve all shared across the decades.

“When I was driving a cab, and we were rehearsing five nights a week at 10 East 23rd Street, I had a faith and a belief that these would be days that one day we could look back upon as magical and special. It was important to have something to romanticise about when we were spending Thanksgiving eating turkey sandwiches in a loft. But what’s grown out of that is a man – and a band – who has accomplished and

experienced so much more than I ever knew existed. You can only dream of what you can comprehend, of what you know exists. It’s not until you reach certain heights that you realise there’s actually more to aspire to.”

Without doubt, Kiss’s first headline appearance at this iconic, history-laden arena was ‘a moment’, a huge marker in signifying how far they had come. Asked to cast his mind back to the night of February 18, 1977, and share his memories, Stanley laughs and replies instantly: “I remember I took a half a Valium. I was nervous,” he admits. “But in the best way. I had faith in what we could do, but we still have to go out there and do it, to prove ourselves worthy of the crowd that came to see us. That was the challenge. For me, nerves always come from a lack of experience. Once you succeed at doing something time and time again, there’s no need for nerves. People ask me today if I’m nervous before I go on stage, and my answer is no. I know what we’re going to give the audience, and I’m confident and excited. But playing New York is different. To look out into the audience and see your family touches a lot of emotional buttons. Playing the Garden for the first time, it was almost overwhelming to look out and see my parents and



Steven Van Zandt is among the star-studded audience.



One of rock's most iconic bands go out with a bang at one of the world's most iconic venues.

As show time nears, all performers need time and space to focus, and knowing when to get the fuck out of their way is an important and often undervalued gift for anyone working on the periphery of creative industries. Given that there are literally hundreds of people involved in bringing the final show of Kiss's final tour to not only the 19,500 people seated in the venue tonight, but tens of thousands more watching worldwide via a pay-per-view livestream, the mood backstage is surprisingly chilled. Blessed with a rather snazzy die-cut pass, I'm allowed to roam freely around the arena, realising, with mild horror at one point, that I'm actually standing almost directly beneath the stage. Before access privileges are rescinded, I slope off to the 'Nashville' hospitality room, where former Skid Row frontman Sebastian Bach is loudly holding court, and the presence of superstar illusionist Criss Angel is pointed out. E Street band guitarist 'Little' Steven Van Zandt is also in the house, as is Mötley Crüe guitarist John

5, but beyond that, your correspondent must admit to failing miserably at identifying scores of familiar-looking faces. Apologies, anonymous A-Listers, my bad.

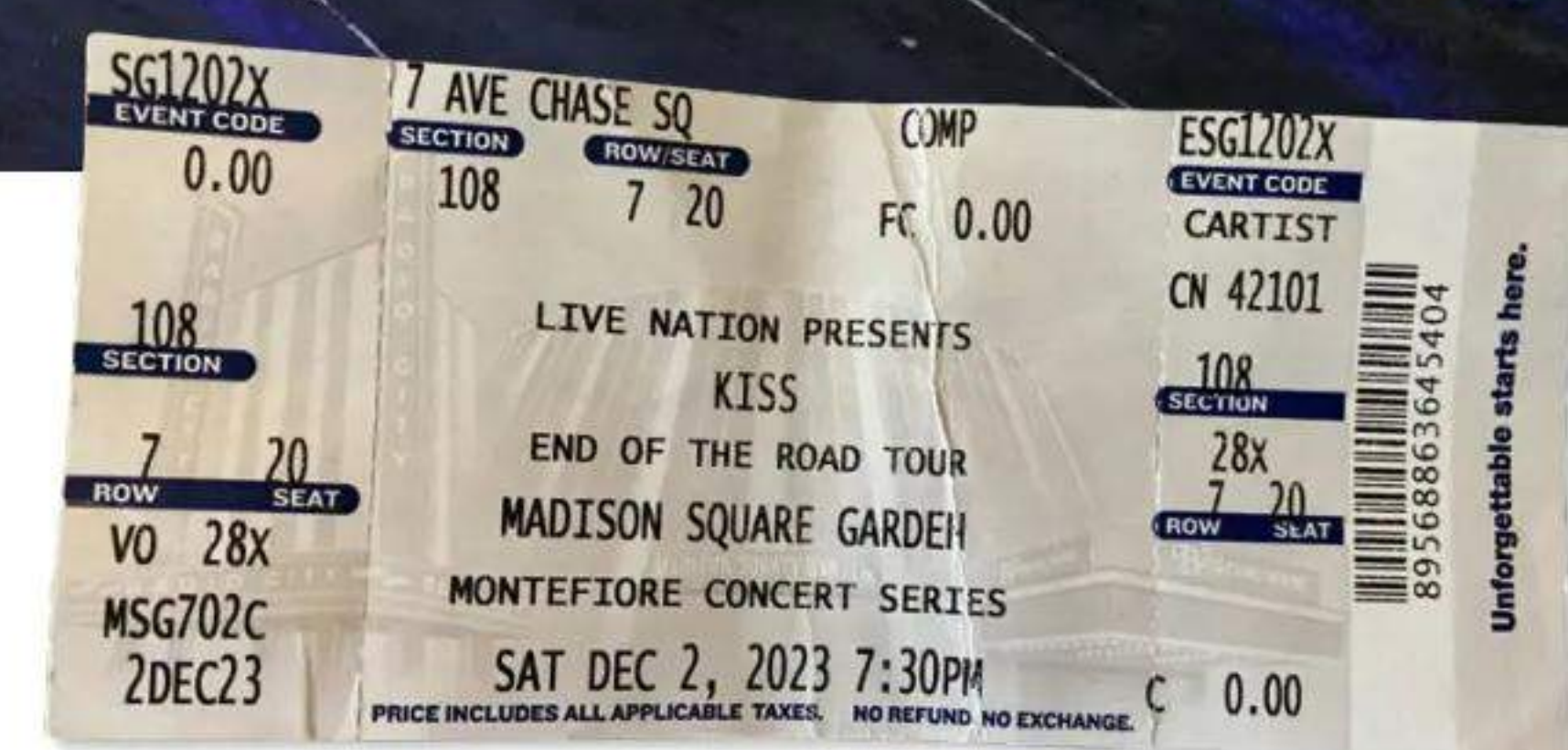
While earwigging on industry conversations, I do, however, note that more than one stakeholder in the brand makes reference to

"The end of this road is the beginning of another road... You'll see us in all different things, all the time."

Paul Stanley

a mysterious 'Phoenix Project', a coded secret surprise that will only make sense later.

And so to the business end of the evening: the loudest, most dazzling, retina-scorching, synapse-frying retirement party one could ever wish to attend.



"Alright New York! You wanted the best. You got the best... The Hottest Band In The World... KISSSSSSSSSSSSSS!" "So this is the end of the road," Paul Stanley muses aloud after *Shout It Out Loud* follows a thrillingly bombastic *Detroit Rock City*, his words met by gently disapproving boos. "I know, I know," he responds sympathetically. "It seems sad, but tonight's a night for joy, tonight's a night to celebrate what

we've done together. We couldn't have done it without you, New York!"

What follows is two hours of joyously uninhibited, unself-conscious rock'n'roll thrills... and some extended instrumental solo spots that we don't have the heart to criticise today. From the perspective afforded from an aisle seat on ➤



Thank you, goodnight,
and goodbye. Or is it?!



“The response we’ve had on this tour is everything I ever hoped for, and more.”

Paul Stanley



Section 108, Row 7 – close enough that the heat generated by the walls of ceiling-scorching flames causes perspiration to slide down one’s face – I am delighted to report that the self-professed Hottest Band In The World’s last stand in the city that never sleeps looked and sounded pretty fucking spectacular.

Hamming it up to the home support, Stanley elicits roars of approval for pointing out: “We don’t have to go to the Bronx to see a zoo” ahead of *Psycho Circus*, and re-tells, perhaps for the very last time, his well-worn anecdote about driving gig-goers to this very room to see Elvis in 1972: “They looked at me like I was crazy when I said: ‘One of these days, people are going to come here to see me and my band...’ And here we are!” Tommy Thayer nearly loses his cool at one point after spotting Sebastian Bach bawling his eyes out in row 10, but only he noticed. Bach isn’t the only one sobbing as louder-than-life anthems *Black Diamond*, *Deuce* and *God Of Thunder* shake the foundations, Simmons at his blood-spurting, tongue-wagging best while delivering his signature tune.

Ahead of the night’s second encore, *Do You Love Me*, there’s a moment that speaks rather beautifully to the love and trust shared across five decades by Simmons and Stanley. With the dynamic duo sharing a stage-right podium not 20 feet from me, Stanley urges the faithful to show their appreciation for his Demonic bestie. With perfect comic timing, Simmons then shuts down

this sweet bromantic gesture by pretending to cup Stanley’s testicles. Classic Gene, timeless bants.

And then... that phoenix [project] from the flames.

“The end of this road is the beginning of another road,” Stanley says, somewhat cryptically. “We’re not going anywhere... You’ll see us in all different things, all the time. See you in your dreams.”

As 19,500 human brains whirr into action trying to decode that message, Kiss cede the stage to four youthful, instantly recognisable digital avatars on side-stage screens.

“Kiss Army, your love, your power has made us immortal!” Digi-Paul Stanley boldly proclaims, as Kiss 2.0 strike up a suitably bombastic *God Gave Rock ‘N’ Roll To You*. “A new Kiss era starts now!”

Well, well, well. It’s a curve ball that leaves the entire audience gawping in wonder and awe long after the flesh-and-blood Kiss have kicked off their stack heels and disappeared under a tsunami of hugs from tearful, elated and proud family members.

“What we’ve accomplished has been amazing, but it’s not enough,” Stanley says in a post-gig statement shared on the band’s website. “The band deserves to live on because the band is bigger than we are. It’s exciting for us to go the next step and see Kiss immortalised.”

“We can be forever young and forever iconic by taking us to places we’ve never dreamed of before,” Simmons adds.

While Madison Square Garden empties, pay-per-view viewers are treated to a ‘post-match’ interview from an unusually subdued and understandably emotional Simmons reflecting on what he calls the band’s “crazy journey”. He then decides to tell the world that, pre-show, he attempted, and failed, to pass a huge kidney stone.

“I was being in the bathroom,” he over-shares, “and I felt it burning on the tip of my cock, but it could not come out.” As the interviewer attempts to absorb this insider information, a crew member jokes that the offending object could provide an unanticipated income source from the event, as and when it emerges. “Put it on eBay?” Simmons muses, then looks down the camera lens, rubs his fingers together and sings: “Money, money, money, money” in a high-pitched voice.

Never change, Gene Simmons, never change.

As the morning after the night before dawns in New York City, at first glance a Kiss-free world looks not entirely dissimilar to the one the band just vacated. Wandering through Manhattan in search of a hangover-absorbing breakfast, I happen upon the Kiss pop-up store at 248 West 37th Street, easily identified by its shop window displaying Bob Gruen’s iconic image of Paul Stanley, Gene Simmons, Ace Frehley and Peter Criss atop the Empire State Building in the summer of 1976. The shop is closed, and an inlaid clock that had been counting down the hours and minutes to the Garden shows is no longer in motion. Instead it now displays a simple message: ‘KISS4EVR’.

The game is over. Kiss won. 🏆





The Soundtrack Of My Life

Kiss bassist, fire breather and Beast
Gene Simmons
on the records, artists and gigs that are of lasting significance to him.

Interview: **Paul Elliott**



GENE SIMMONS: KEVIN NIXON; JAMES BROWN: DAVID REDFERN/GETTY

“If we’re talking about charisma – not just a singer but a performer – it’s James Brown.”

Gene Simmons is the living, fire-breathing embodiment of the American Dream: the immigrant who found fame and fortune, in his case as co-leader of rock superstars Kiss. But when he talks about the music he loves, he is very much the Anglophile. “For me, England is holy ground,” he says. “The Beatles changed life on Earth! And then you had the Stones, The Who, Queen and so on.” He feels that the cultural exchange between the US and the UK was uneven. “You guys gave us Led Zeppelin, and we gave you the Grateful fucking Dead!” But there is some American music he holds dear. Surprisingly, the God Of Thunder is also a soul boy at heart.

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

It was black music. Chuck Berry, Little Richard, James Brown, Ray Charles – all the greats. When I moved to America with my mother, I was eight and I couldn’t speak a word of English. So I didn’t understand the words in songs like *Good Golly Miss Molly*: ‘She sure likes to ball’ – you know, she likes to fuck! I didn’t know that the term ‘rock’n’roll’ meant sex. I was just moved by this music, even though I didn’t know how to dance.

THE FIRST SONG I PERFORMED IN FRONT OF AN AUDIENCE

When I was thirteen I had a school buddy, Seth Dogramajian, who played guitar and we’d sing harmony like the Everly Brothers. We called ourselves the Missing Links. Our first performance was at Joseph Pulitzer Junior High School in Jackson Heights, Queens, and I think the first song was a Beatles song, *There’s A Place*.

THE SONGWRITER

It’s either Lennon or McCartney. Because for every *Eleanor Rigby*, every *Yesterday*, you had *Across The Universe*, which is haunting like no other song I’ve ever heard. Even a song that Lennon wasn’t fond of, *And Your Bird Can Sing*, nobody has ever sounded like that before or after. So many great songs. It’s incredible. And let’s not forget George Harrison. He was supposed to be less talented because he didn’t write *All You Need Is Love* and all those other hits. But then he came up with *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*, *Something* and *Here Comes The Sun*. So it’s like: “Oh, that guy’s a genius too!”

THE SINGER

Roy Orbison had the best voice for rock’n’roll songs. But if you listen to *Baby Workout* by Jackie Wilson, that voice is just undeniable. And if we’re talking about charisma – not just a singer but a performer – then it’s James Brown. I remember a TV show from the sixties that had the Stones and The Beach Boys and James Brown. The Stones were closing the show, and while James Brown was on stage there was a close-up of Mick Jagger watching him and biting his nails.

James Brown was just killing it like nobody I’ve ever seen. It was astonishing how he moved, the way he was contorting his body.

THE GUITAR HERO

There’s Jeff Beck and there’s Hendrix, and then there’s Eddie Van Halen, who made my head turn like Linda Blair in *The Exorcist*. Like: “What the fuck is that?” Certainly the people that changed guitar playing were Hendrix and Eddie Van Halen. But I think they all looked up to Beck as the *guv’nor*. And yet who came up with the most riffs? It’s Jimmy Page. Nobody else comes close.

THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

My first thought is *Sgt. Pepper*, but I could also pick one of Stevie Wonder’s classic records, say *Innervisions*. When you think about talent, Stevie Wonder can do it all: songwriting, arranging, singing, keyboards, guitar, bass, drums. Oh, and I forgot to mention he’s blind!

THE BEST RECORD I’VE MADE

In hindsight, Kiss never really spent enough time in the studio. *Destroyer* is okay, and I like *Revenge*, but Kiss was always more about the live experience.

THE WORST RECORD I’VE MADE

Music From ‘The Elder’. I take the blame for it, because it was my idea. I remember telling [producer] Bob Ezrin that I was writing a movie script, we were making a concept album based on that, and he said: “Let’s do our own *Tommy*!” I said: “Yeah. If The Who can do it, why can’t we?” Well, the straight answer is because we’re not The Who! There are some fans who love that record. To me it was dishonest. But really, the most dishonest record we ever made was *Carnival Of Souls*, when we were trying to follow a trend instead of just being ourselves.

MY SATURDAY NIGHT SONG

If you’re in a place where there’s lots of girls, it’s Sir Mix-A-Lot’s *Baby Got Back*.

MY ‘IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE’ SONG

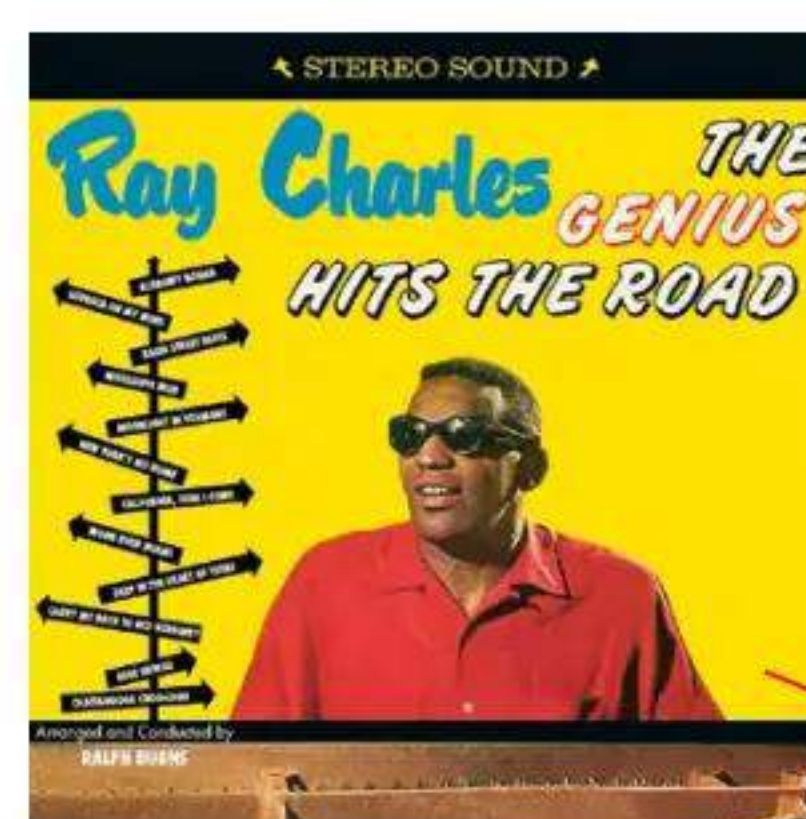
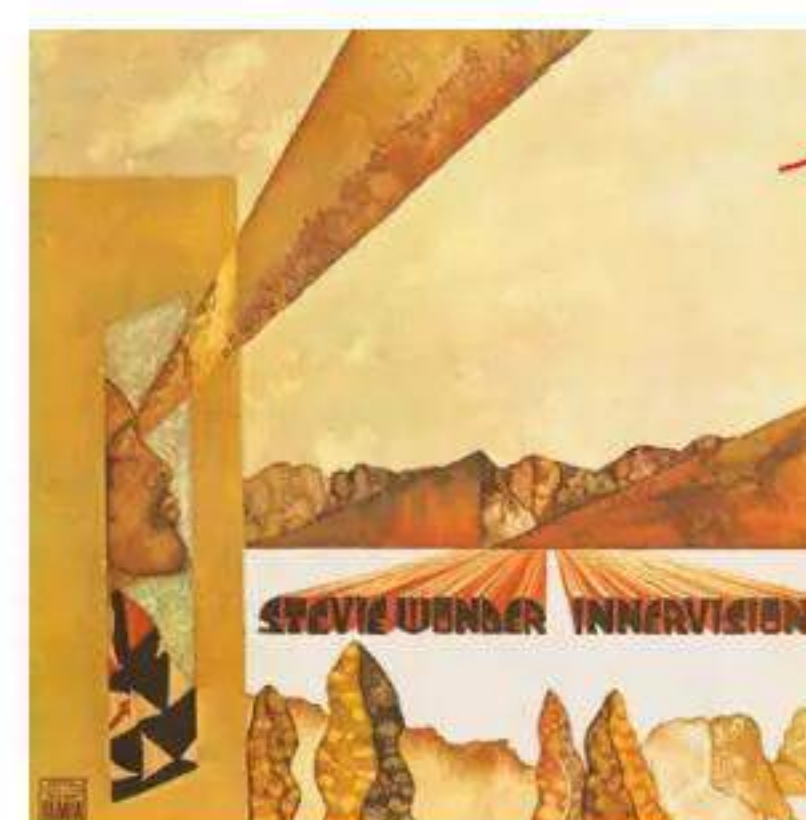
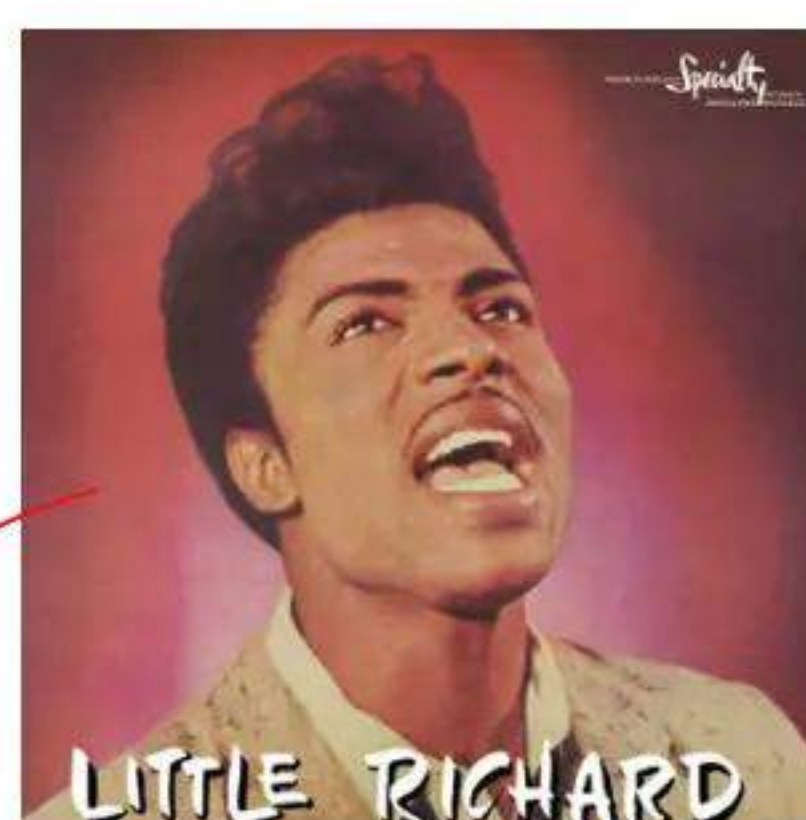
Jeff Beck doing *Nessun Dorma*. Oh my goodness! It’s so rousing, especially the end. It’s grand – and what we’re about to do is grand!

THE SONG THAT MAKES ME CRY

Generally speaking, the more emotional songs, the ones that get me teary-eyed, are by black singers. Luther Vandross had this song *Dance With My Father*, with all the memories he had as a little kid. And when you hear Ray Charles singing *Georgia On My Mind*, you feel the longing.

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

I’ve had the most amazing life, so I don’t want people to be sad. I want them to have a party. Just pop that champagne and have a good time. So play *Baby Workout* by Jackie Wilson and everybody dance. Don’t mourn the death, celebrate the life! 🎉







BASICS INSTINCT

Banned from MTV. Drunken shenanigans. USA-upsetting videos. Band members bugging off...After a stylistic detour with previous album *Hot Space*, with *The Works* **Queen** got back to basics, and returned to their rock roots and to the 'real Queen' sound.

Words: **Mark Blake**

"Here's one for all you heavy metal fans to have a good jerk-off to," Freddie Mercury said to the audience gathered inside Auckland's Mount Smart Stadium. On cue, Brian May struck up the riff to *Hammer To Fall* – and hoped the singer would remember the words to it.

It was April 13, 1985, during the final leg of Queen's *The Works* tour, and Mercury was, in his own words, "fucking pissed". Pop dandies Spandau Ballet were having a day off on their New Zealand tour, and earlier in the day vocalist Tony Hadley had gatecrashed Queen's sound-check. Mercury spirited him away for "a little drinkie". One bottle of Stolichnaya vodka and another of vintage port later, and it was show time.

Just before going on stage, Mercury was so inebriated he had to lie on the dressing-room sofa while a couple of aides laced up his boxing boots. When he staggered to his feet, he realised they'd put his tights on back-to-front. "Oh you stupid c**ts," he hissed, as Queen's intro music began playing over the PA. The minions frantically removed his footwear and leggings, and Mercury bounded on stage just in time.

Performing drunk was a rare lapse of judgement. Either that, or a cathartic release at the end of a challenging tour. Queen's eleventh album, *The Works*, had been a UK No.2 hit, but had flatlined in America; their videos weren't being shown on MTV; the group had been blacklisted for performing in apartheid South Africa, and were booed in Rio de Janeiro.

The Works delivered four solid gold hits: *Radio Ga Ga*, *I Want To Break Free*, *It's A Hard Life* and *Hammer To Fall*. But before their show-stopping appearance at Live Aid in the

summer of 1985, Queen were in disarray. "By the end of *The Works* we all needed a break," May admitted. Drummer Roger Taylor insisted: "We hadn't broken up, but we didn't know what was coming next."

Mercury's remark about "heavy metal fans" was a glimpse into his present mind-set. He was about to release his debut solo album, *Mr Bad Guy*, which was filled with the sort of dance music he heard in the clubs around his adopted home cities of New York and Munich.

Mercury was no longer swanning around in a satin jumpsuit, singing about 'the mighty titan and his troubadours'. Now sporting the short hair and thick moustache on trend in the gay community, he was also smuggling his nouveau influences into Queen.

The group's 1980 album *The Game* had dialled down on their usual grandiloquent hard rock, while 1982's *Hot Space* was such a departure that it confused their fan base – and some of the band. Brian May struggled to have his guitar heard on the R&B tracks

Body Language and *Staying Power*. And his reduced role in the Queen/David Bowie love-in *Under Pressure* has niggled him for decades. "One of these days I would like to remix it," May has said, repeatedly.

However, *Hot Space*'s modest chart placing and the subsequent tour's weaker ticket sales had knocked Queen's confidence. "*Hot Space* got us out of our comfort zone but was probably a step too far," admitted May, who took himself off to Los Angeles to make *Star Fleet Project*, a mini-album, with fellow guitar hero Eddie Van Halen and heavy friends.

"*Hot Space* wasn't really us, was it?" ventured Taylor, ➤

**"Oh, we argued
about everything.
But it was usually
for the good of
the music."**

— **Brian May** —

One of rock's great singer/guitarist combos: Freddie Mercury and Brian May on Queen's 1984 European tour.



who was soon busy with his second solo album, *Strange Frontier*.

Then Queen received a proposal. Director Tony Richardson was making a film of John Irving's novel *The Hotel New Hampshire*, a tale of a dysfunctional family blighted by suicide and incest. Would Queen score the soundtrack?

In July 1983, Mercury and bass guitarist John Deacon met Richardson in Los Angeles, and booked the Record Plant studio for a month's time. The rest of Queen and producer Reinhold Mack (known simply as 'Mack') joined them soon after. The decision to go back to work couldn't have come quick enough for Deacon, the only Queen member who didn't have a solo record deal. "I went spare, because we were doing so little," he admitted. "I got bored and quite depressed."

There were business factors involved too. Mercury refused to record for Queen's US label, Elektra, whom he blamed for *Hot Space's* commercial failure. "Freddie was so depressed about the situation, it was doubtful he would have agreed to make a new Queen album," said May.

Queen's business manager, Jim Beach, paid to release Queen from Elektra before signing them to Capitol in the US. It was enough to persuade Mercury back into the studio. Tasked with recording a soundtrack and a new album, Queen hoped that recording in Los Angeles rather than Munich's Musicland Studios (where they'd made *The Game* and *Hot Space*) would focus their minds.

"We'd all become emotionally disconnected in Munich," May explained; a discreet way of saying the nightlife had impacted on their work, their marriages and even their sanity.

However, before long, Rod Stewart and Jeff Beck were dropping by the Record Plant for an all-night jam, while the nearby Coronet Pub and Osco's, a disco famed for its female mud-wrestling nights, exerted a magnetic pull on band and crew members alike.

Soon, most of the retinue were tooling around town in rented sports cars. Mercury moved into Elizabeth Taylor's old residence, a dazzling pink villa in Bel Air, which he filled with hundreds of dollars' worth of flowers. On one of

his many nights out in West Hollywood, Mercury met a biker known as 'Vince The Barman', and moved him into the property. Vince became the object of Mercury's affections and the recipient of many lavish gifts.

"The accountant was on the phone every day," recalled Mack. "He'd never seen people burn through as much money as we did. Soon after we arrived in LA he was asking questions like: 'Why do you have nineteen rental cars when there are only eight of you?'"

For the first time, Queen also invited an outsider into the sessions: Fred Mandel, a Canadian musician who'd previously played keyboards on the US leg of the *Hot Space* tour. "I was making a record with Alice Cooper [*Flush The Fashion*]," recalled Mandel. "[Queen's old producer] Roy Thomas Baker was producing, and recommended me to Queen."

However, Queen's working methods had changed since Baker's day. "You'd have two of them in one studio and two in another working on different songs," explained Mack. "The last time the four of them were all in the studio at the same time was *The Game*. Now everyone was on different schedules."

Accommodating four writers became a greater challenge with each album. Queen brought around 20 songs to the sessions, and the editing process was brutal. Several of Taylor's songs were rejected. However, the rejection helped Taylor raise his game. Queen had abandoned their

"By the end of The Works we all needed a break."

— Brian May —





Queen on the video shoots for *It's A Hard Life* (this pic and right) and (above) *Radio Ga Ga*.



Freddie Mercury famously described Queen as “four cocks fighting”. When the conflict became too much, Mack sought refuge in a bar across the road from the Record Plant: “It was somewhere for me and John Deacon to get some peace and quiet.”

The producer's Zen-like calm defused some of the tension, and Fred Mandel maintained a Swiss-style neutrality during band arguments. “Queen were rational, intelligent guys,” the keyboard player explained. “When they came together they were like the four musketeers, but there were disagreements. I'm not saying they weren't rock'n'roll, but they

weren't Guns N'Roses, arguing about downing a fifth of Jack. They were more likely to be arguing about the wingspan of a butterfly.”

“Oh, we argued about everything,” May concurred. “But it was usually for the good of the music. We all believed passionately in what we were doing.”

Unfortunately for May, this meant being sidelined on one of *The Works*' biggest hits. Mack nicknamed John Deacon ‘The Ostrich’, because of his ability to remain silent for long periods of time before “laying the perfect egg”.

By 1983, Deacon had laid two with the UK and US hits *You're*

My Best Friend and *Another One Bites The Dust* and was about to deliver another, *I Want To Break Free*. However, Deacon, rather than May, played acoustic guitar on the song, and Mandel played the solo on his Roland Jupiter-8 synthesiser.

“John didn't want a guitar solo on the song,” Taylor explained. “So he got Fred [Mandel] to improvise something around the main tune.”

“This was controversial,” Mandel admitted, “as apparently no one did solos apart from Brian. But I didn't think anything of it, as I'd done the same on Alice Cooper records. It was no big deal, but people thought it was a big deal.”

Tellingly, May's guitar was added to the intro in the single mix.

“The last time the four of them were all in the studio at the same time was *The Game*.”

— Producer Mack —



previous ‘No Synthesisers’ policy. Taylor was using both a synth and a drum machine on a new piece of music with May. The guitarist kept his part for another song, *Machines (Or Back To Humans)*, and Taylor used his for what became *Radio Ga Ga*. But it was a happy accident: “I couldn't have written the song on a guitar. I don't want to know about anything technical — like what the chords are called.”

It was Mercury who spotted the song's potential. Before Taylor left for a skiing holiday, he gave Mercury his blessing to do as he wished with *Radio Ga Ga*. “I felt there were some construction elements that were wrong,” said Mercury, “so I took the song over”.

The song's title was inspired by Taylor and

his French partner Dominique Beyrand's toddler son Felix, who murmured “ca ca” (Taylor: “French for something that comes out of your bottom”) while hearing an unnamed song on the radio. Mercury changed the words to ‘ga ga’, on a song mourning a lost, bygone age of radio. When Capitol Records president Jim Mazza heard it, he sent a telex to Queen's management, worried that the lyrics would alienate the radio networks. Mazza asked if they could be tweaked to become “a supportive endorsement of radio's future rather than a prediction of its demise”.

Queen never divulged whether they changed the words. But it was an early indication of the group's difficult relationship with Capitol, and America as a whole. It would only get worse.



Freddie Mercury in full flow with Queen in 1984.

After two months in LA, film director Tony Richardson announced that his budget couldn't stretch to Queen, and he'd have to use existing music instead. The band repurposed some of their *The Hotel New Hampshire* material for *The Works*, but decided it would be more cost effective to finish the album in Munich.

Not everyone would be joining them, though. Vince The Barman turned down Mercury's offer to leave LA, bringing their relationship to a sudden end. Mercury drifted into the Record Plant looking downcast. After sitting quietly for a time, he suddenly exploded. "It's okay for all of you!" he shouted at anyone in earshot. "You all have your wives and families. I can never be happy."

Mercury would explore these emotions in another new song, *It's A Hard Life*. "It's one of the most beautiful songs Freddie ever wrote," suggested May, "and he really opened up during the creation of it."

In Munich, though, everybody returned to their old haunts and habits. The proprietor of the Sugar Shack discotheque (immortalised in the Queen song *Dragon Attack*) welcomed them back with a bottle of their usual tippie, Moskovskaya vodka, and Mercury wrecked the ligaments in his knee during drunken high jinks in the city's New York bar. One day, after a bad bout of musical differences, May left Queen and spent a few hours pondering his future in a park in central Munich before deciding to carry on.

The feeling was contagious. John Deacon quit for an impromptu holiday in Bali, but told only his bass tech that he was going. When Mercury heard the news, he jumped on a studio table and began crooning *Bali Ha'i* from the musical *South Pacific*.

When Deacon returned, the sessions continued as before. The only difference was the bass player's sunburnt skin flaking off over the mixing desk, prompting Mercury to nickname him 'Snakeman'. "We were okay about Deaky going to Bali," recalled May, "because we were all going mad as well."

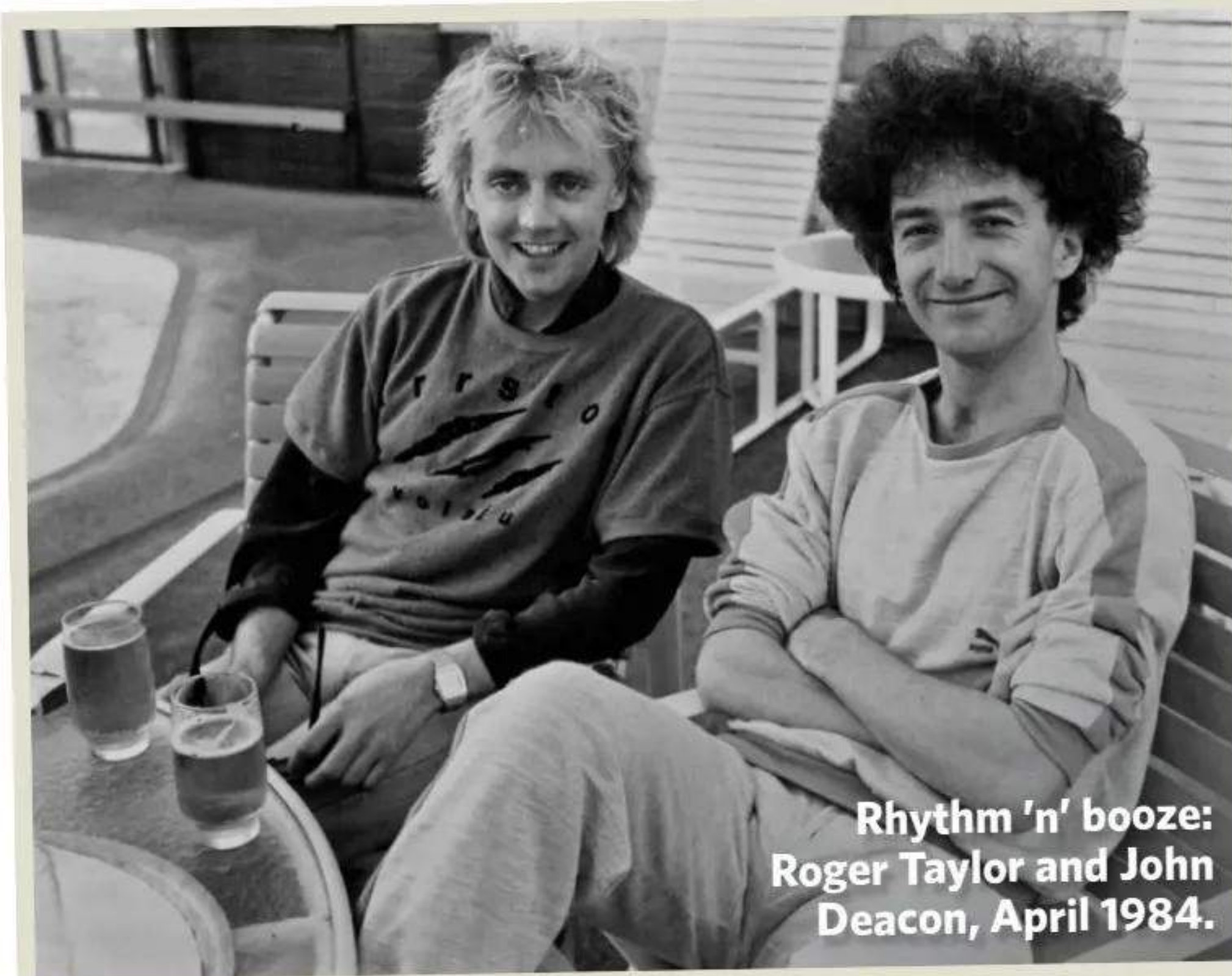
The world received its first taste of *The Works* when *Radio Ga Ga* was released as a single in January 1984. The song was credited solely to Taylor, giving him his first UK top-five hit since *I'm In Love With My Car*, the B-side to *Bohemian Rhapsody* in 1975.

In typically contrary style, Queen had hired David Mallet to direct a video (which eventually cost £110,000) promoting a song moaning about the dominance of video. But Queen were nothing if not pragmatic.

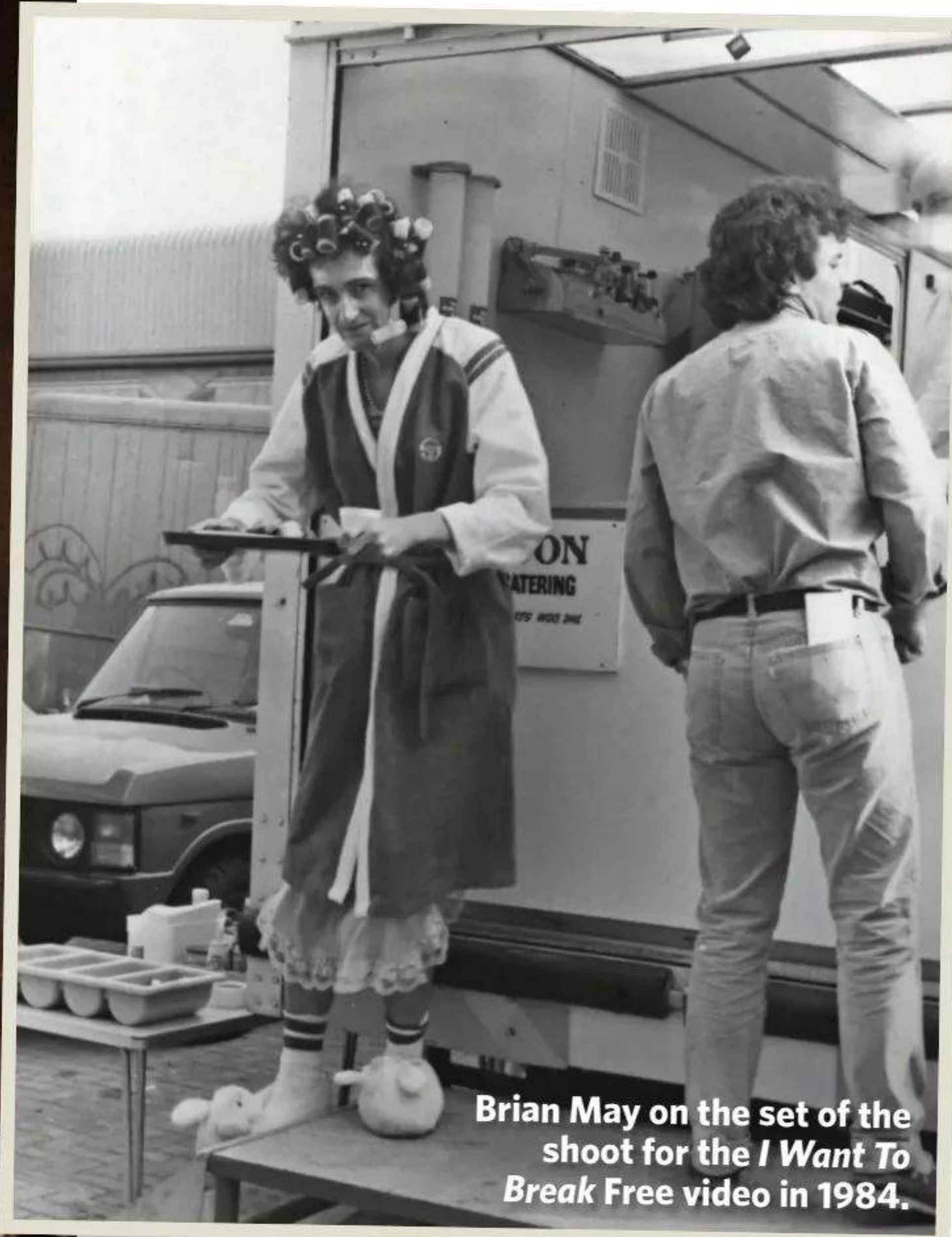
"We were okay about Deaky going to Bali, because we were all going mad as well."

Brian May

Mercury and producer Giorgio Moroder were dabbling with the soundtrack for a new version of Fritz Lang's 1927 sci-fi movie *Metropolis*. Lang's footage of industrial cogs and smoke-belching chimneys was stripped into Mallet's film, which showed Queen zooming around in a flying car, and conducting 500 extras in a synchronised handclap. This part was supposed to illustrate how modern radio's meaningless 'ga ga' had



Rhythm 'n' booze: Roger Taylor and John Deacon, April 1984.



Brian May on the set of the shoot for the *I Want To Break Free* video in 1984.

turned listeners into gormless drones. But some critics compared the scene to a Nazi party rally. "People thought we were *really* trying to be dictators," May grumbled. None of this mattered when *Radio Ga Ga* became a UK No.2 hit.

But the single tanked in America. At the time, many record labels used independent pluggers to secure radio airplay with clandestine payments. Now an industry-wide investigation was under way, and the labels panicked.

"So Capitol got rid of all their independent guys," May explained, "and the reprisal from the networks was aimed at the artists who had records out. *Radio Ga Ga* was rising, but the week after that it disappeared."

However, Queen's dealings with American radio had become problematic around the time of *Hot Space*. For years, May refused to name Mercury's personal manager, Paul Prenter, in interviews, referring to him only as "the guy who looked after Fred". This was no longer possible after the *Bohemian Rhapsody* movie. Here, Prenter (played by actor Allen Leach) was reborn as a classic movie villain who drove a wedge between Mercury and Queen.

"It wasn't far off the truth," said May. "He was very dismissive with the radio stations. 'I discovered later that he went around saying: 'No, Freddie doesn't want to talk to you.''"

"Prenter was always whispering in Freddie's ear," confirmed Mack. "They were both into R&B and disco, so you had Prenter telling Freddie that Queen were old-fashioned and he didn't need guitars."

However, *The Works* (named after another of Mercury's favourite clubs and his pre-tour rallying cry: "Give 'em the fucking works!") was unlike *Hot Space*. Released in February 1984, it was a belting rock album cunningly spliced with pop songs and ballads.

Mercury's compositions ranged from the inspired to the throwaway. His courtly ballad *It's A Hard Life* lived up to May's praise, while *Man On The Prowl* was rockabilly-by-numbers redeemed by Fred Mandel's honky-tonk piano. *Keep Passing The Open Windows* ➤



“We were taking the mickey out of ourselves. But in America they said: ‘What are our idols doing dressing up in frocks?’”

Freddie Mercury on the *I Want To Break Free* video



"Looking for a good time?" Queen at Wembley Arena on Freddie Mercury's 38th birthday, September 5, 1984.

(titled after the family's catchphrase in *The Hotel New Hampshire*) had a maddening chorus, and lyrics straight out of Mercury's self-empowerment handbook ('You just gotta be strong and believe in yourself...'). *Is This The World We Created...*? was written at the last minute to provide a *Love Of My Life*-type ballad.

May and Taylor shared the credits on *Machines (Or Back To Humans)*, a mash-up of synthesiser, Vocoder and howling guitar, with now dated lyrics about 'bytes and megachips', and May scored with two blood-and-guts rockers: *Tear It Up* and *Hammer To Fall*, the latter using the catchiest of hooks to warn listeners that we were all doomed if Reagan or Chernenko started World War III.

The Works reached No.2 in the UK and No.23 in the States. The numbers would have been better had Queen toured America. "But Freddie didn't want to go back and play smaller venues," said May. "He was like: 'Let's just wait and then soon we'll go out and do stadiums as well.'"

However, Queen were about to scupper their chances further. A second single, *I Want To Break Free*, became a UK No.3 hit, accompanied by an hilarious but problematic video. A pastiche of the British soap opera *Coronation Street* was always going to be a bit parochial, but Queen appearing in drag was too much for MTV. Two decades later, Dave Grohl dressed as several women in the promo for the Foo Fighters' *Learn To Fly*. But when Queen did it 40 years ago, MTV refused to use their video.

"For the first time in our lives we were taking the mickey out of ourselves," Mercury protested. "But in America they said: 'What are our idols doing dressing up in frocks?'"

"MTV hated it," said May. "They could not accept a rock group dressing as women, and in America Queen were still seen as a rock group."

Then again, it was difficult to imagine Eddie Van Halen modelling May's pink nightdress and hair curlers, nor even Dave Lee Roth wearing fake breasts and pushing a vacuum cleaner, à la Freddie. So convincing was Roger Taylor's schoolgirl that David Mallet's fiancée spotted him and Taylor in a huddle and thought they were having an affair.

"I'm Canadian, so I got it," recalled Fred Mandel. "I mean, come on, it's just Benny Hill, typical British humour. I also liked seeing Roger doing the

dressed as a giant prawn in the video. I was terribly disappointed."

Mercury, in his prawn-like ensemble, roamed a Bacchanalian wonderland populated by cross-dressing ballerinas and extras in ball gowns and insect heads. Partway through, Taylor and Deacon sloped into view wearing tights and Elizabethan ruffs (with the drummer's late 20th-century baseball boots visible in one shot).

It's *A Hard Life* was another UK Top 10 hit, while the next single, *Hammer To Fall*, reached No.13. Both cued up Queen's world tour, albeit minus America. "There were always other places for us to go where we were selling well," suggested May. Regrettably, these included South Africa, where *I Want To Break Free* had gone to No.1.

In October, Queen defied the United Nations' anti-apartheid boycott to play Sun City, a hotel/casino complex in Bophuthatswana. They'd been informed that racial segregation didn't apply there. Which was nonsense. With tickets costing the equivalent of more than £50 each in South African rand, Queen performed to a sea of white faces in a wealthy white person's playground.

The band received a Musicians Union fine and were placed on the United Nations blacklist. "Queen are jerks," declared Daryl Hall, of soft-rock duo Hall And Oates, and one of the Artists United Against Apartheid collective.

"We thought we could build bridges," May said. "We are totally and fundamentally opposed to apartheid."

"On balance, going there was a mistake," conceded Taylor.

Mercury, who was born in Zanzibar, in the Indian Ocean off the coast of East Africa, never ventured an opinion.

A month after their ill-fated trip to South Africa, Queen released a non-album single, *Thank God It's Christmas*. The title sounded like a collective sigh of relief. But it was eclipsed by Band Aid's *Do They Know It's Christmas?*, a charity single from which Queen were noticeably absent. "I don't know if they would have

had me on the record," suggested Mercury. "I'm a bit old."

In the pre-internet world, it took longer for bands to discover where and why their records were selling. *I Want To Break Free* had been a hit in South Africa because it resonated with supporters of the anti-apartheid African National Congress movement, whose future president, Nelson Mandela, had already spent more than 20 years in prison.

By January 1985, the song had been adopted as a protest anthem in Brazil. After two decades of military dictatorship, the country was about to hold its first democratic election since 1964. Mercury's impassioned 'God knows I want to break free!' spoke to the country's oppressed, meaning that this most apolitical of rock groups had accidentally become political.

That month, Queen arrived in Brazil to play the opening and closing nights of the 10-day Rock In Rio festival at the Barra Da

"We definitely hesitated to say yes. We had to consider whether we were in good enough shape."

Brian May on doing Live Aid

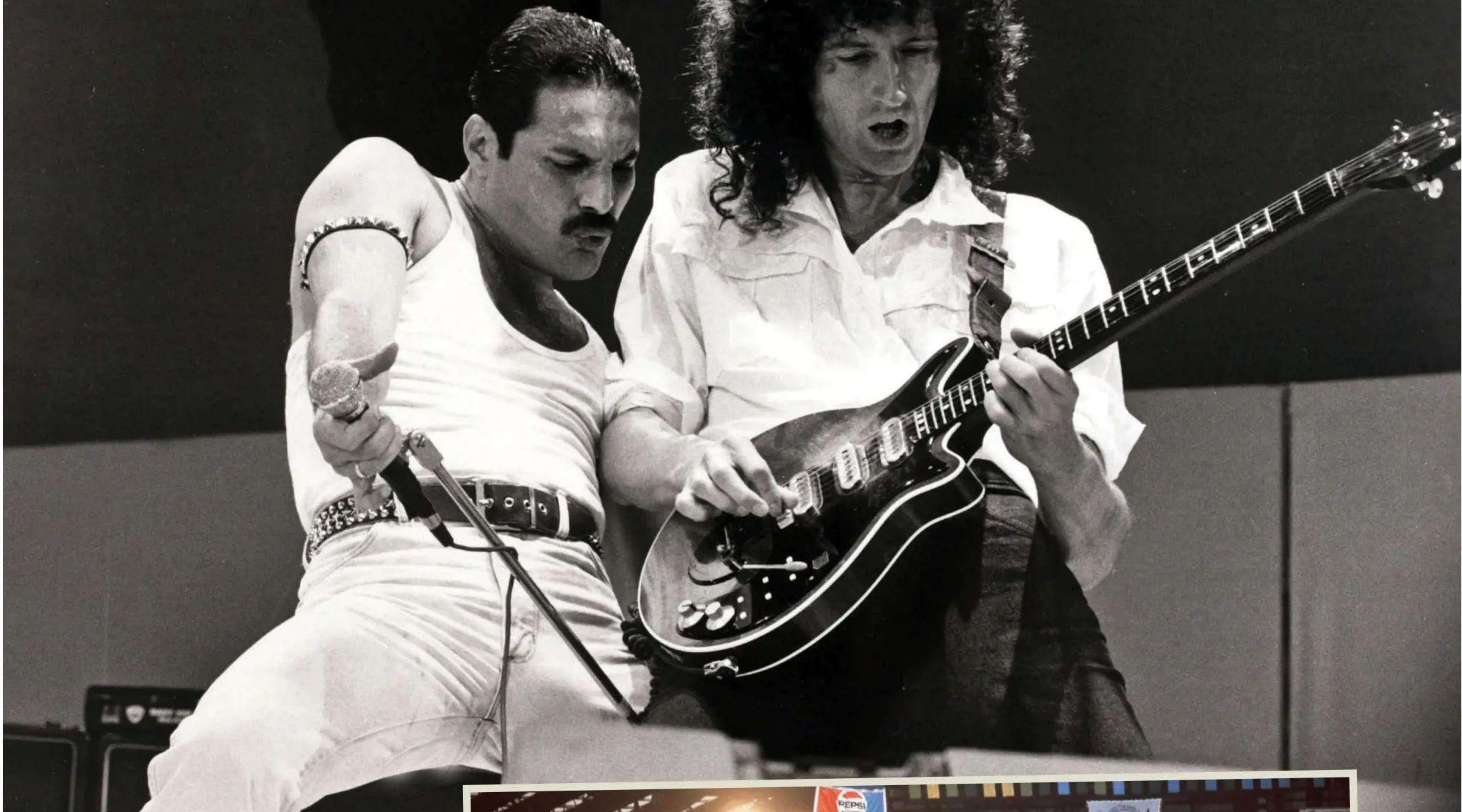
dishes and Freddie doing housework."

Capitol pleaded with Queen to make an alternative performance video for MTV, but Mercury refused. There was no persuading him, something May found frustrating while shooting a promotional clip for the next single, *It's A Hard Life*. May applauded Mercury's willingness to address his emotional turmoil in the song: "And then he went and



Queen press conference in Sydney, Australia, April 15, 1985 during *The Works* world tour.

They were the champions: Queen stole the show at the Wembley Stadium leg of Live Aid, July 13, 1985.



Tijuca stadium in Rio de Janeiro, the biggest rock festival ever held, with a reported attendance of 1.5 million. By now Queen were at the peak of their live powers, and Mercury saw no reason to adapt their show.

After a victory lap of *Crazy Little Thing Called Love*, *Bohemian Rhapsody* and *Radio Ga Ga*, Queen returned to encore with *I Want To Break Free*. Mercury strode in from the wings sporting a wig, and a tight sweater under which he'd jammed a pair of torpedo-shaped plastic breasts. This was his second pair, as previously European audiences had complained that the first ones weren't visible from the cheap seats: "So I had to get some bigger tits."

However, the costume upset the Brazilians, none of whom had seen Queen's video and couldn't understand why Mercury would undermine the song's heartfelt message. Contrary to press reports, they didn't bombard the stage with bottles, but they booed and jeered, until Mercury removed the offending accessories. "There was no place Freddie wouldn't go," May marvelled, years later. "Even singing with false breasts in South America."

The Works, its singles and videos summated Queen's unique place in 80s rock, but also the inner conflict that defined it. "We always wanted to change," Taylor explained, "and we never regarded ourselves as a singles band. But I've come to realise that a lot of people do think of Queen as just that. Or they think that all we did was flounce around in dresses."

By the time Mercury performed drunk at their show in Auckland, Queen had agreed to take a year off after the tour. "I think that we probably all hated each other for a while," said May.



In April 1985, Freddie Mercury released his first solo single, the dance track *I Was Born To Love You*, followed by the album, *Mr Bad Guy*. The rest of Queen wondered if they'd lost him for good. "Freddie had stepped so far away," said May. "I thought we might not get him back."

Then came the request that changed all their lives. Boomtown Rats vocalist Bob Geldof, the brains behind Band Aid, was planning Live Aid, a fundraising concert for famine-stricken Africa. Geldof wanted Queen to play, and wouldn't take no for an answer.

"We definitely hesitated to say yes," recalled May. "We had to consider whether we were in good enough shape. The chances of making fools of ourselves were so big."

They needn't have worried. During the early evening of July 13, Queen arrived to find 72,000 people inside London's Wembley Stadium and cameras waiting to broadcast their performance around the world. Mercury trotted on stage like an eager show pony, flashing a knowing grin, like he was about to deliver the punchline to the world's funniest joke. As he hammered out the opening notes to *Bohemian Rhapsody* on a grand piano, Queen's doubts and fears evaporated. For the next 20 minutes they gave the audience 'the works' and more. The four musketeers had returned to fight another day. 🍀

Magnifico! The A To Z Of Queen by Mark Blake is published by Nine Eight books.

THE
★CLASSIC★
Rock
INTERVIEW

CHRIS ROBINSON & RICH ROBINSON

THE
BLACK CROWES

The siblings talk about growing up, breaking out, breaking up, making up, love, hate, the pros and cons of success, Snakes, Money Makers and Harmony, dizzying highs (both kinds), heartbreaking lows, lost friends, recriminations, reunions... music and much more.

Interview: **Paul Rees** Portrait: **Ross Halfin**

This week in late January 2024, brothers Chris and Rich Robinson are as far apart as they ever were. Geographically speaking at least – 2,000 miles to be precise. Chris, the elder Robinson, sits in the winter sun-dappled backyard of his home in Laurel Canyon, Los Angeles, Rich in the music room of his place in Nashville, Tennessee. Their most obvious common bond just now is intermittent dog trouble. Chris bolts from his seat at one point to stop his dog, Benny, from escaping through his garden gate and onto the road. Rich begs pause to scurry away his seven-month-old puppy.

Differences between the two brothers are as immediately apparent as they have been since they first stepped out at the forefront of The Black Crowes. Chris has his Zoom camera turned on. His sharp-angled face looms in and out of the frame with all his fidgeting. He's baggier under the

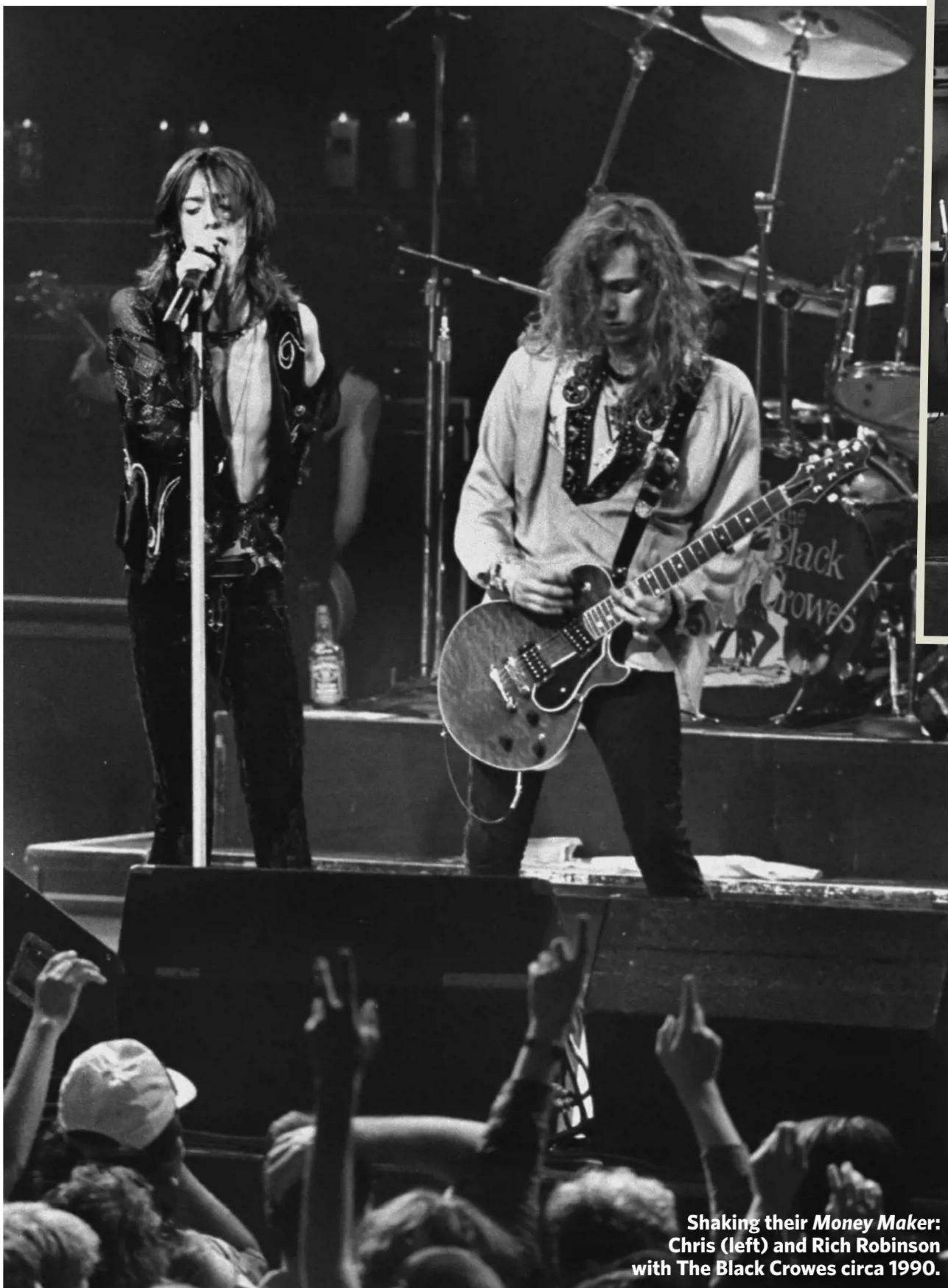
eyes and with pepper-flecked hair these days. Rich keeps his camera off. Both are good talkers, but Rich remains on point while Chris more often than not gets to it eventually but with sundry twists, turns and abrupt diversions en route.

Much ballyhooed, their divisions should never actually have surprised. As most anyone with a brother will know all too well, there is no one quite so familiar and yet so alien as a sibling. "That's the truth of the matter," Chris acknowledges. "Rich and I can agree on a lot of stuff, but we are completely different – and I mean in every way."

Back together again as The Black Crowes for more than four years now, the Robinsons are here to talk up *Happiness Bastards*, the band's first album of original material in 15 years. Begun during the covid pandemic and recorded over two weeks last year in Nashville with garlanded country music producer Jay Joyce, it's at once familiar >



THE BLACK CROWES



“No one’s going to tell a twenty-year-old anything. There was no hesitation or forethought, we just did.”

Rich Robinson

sounding (there’s Stonesy stomping aplenty) and different again (the funky syncopations of, say, *Cross Your Fingers*, or the thin, wild mercury groove of *Bleed It Dry*). Mostly it sounds unburdened and as best emphasised by its hard-driving second track *Rats And Clowns*.

“There’s a lot of AC/DC in that song,” says Chris. “How much fun Rich and I had doing it. As Rich was playing his solo, very inspired by Angus Young, we were both of us laughing. It was like we were back at mum and dad’s house listening to *Let There Be Rock*. That’s what you hear on this record.”

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Robinson brothers starting to make music together. Chris and Rich were born 57 and 55 years ago respectively, in the Atlanta, Georgia suburb of Marietta. Both of their parents, dad Stan

and mum Nancy, sang and played music. Stan professionally as a folk musician in the 1950s, when he scored a minor hit with a novelty tune, *Boom A Dip-Dip* (No.83 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in 1959). The brothers’ first try-out was as a basement punk rock band, Goo Goo Mucks, named after a Cramps song, was when Chris was a mouthy 17-year-old and Rich a shyly sensitive 14.

Within six years, and via the more Byrds-meets-R.E.M.-shaded Mr Crowe’s Garden, they were signed to Rick Rubin’s Def American label as The Black Crowes. The band’s 1990 debut album, *Shake Your Money Maker*, went on to sell

five million copies. Its 1992 follow-up, *The Southern Harmony And Musical Companion*, entered the US *Billboard* chart at No.1. At the grunge-fixated time, its melange of classic rock, country-blues, funk and blue-eyed soul sounded like nothing else. Today that album endures as a crusading high point of the era.

What’s your first vivid memory from childhood?

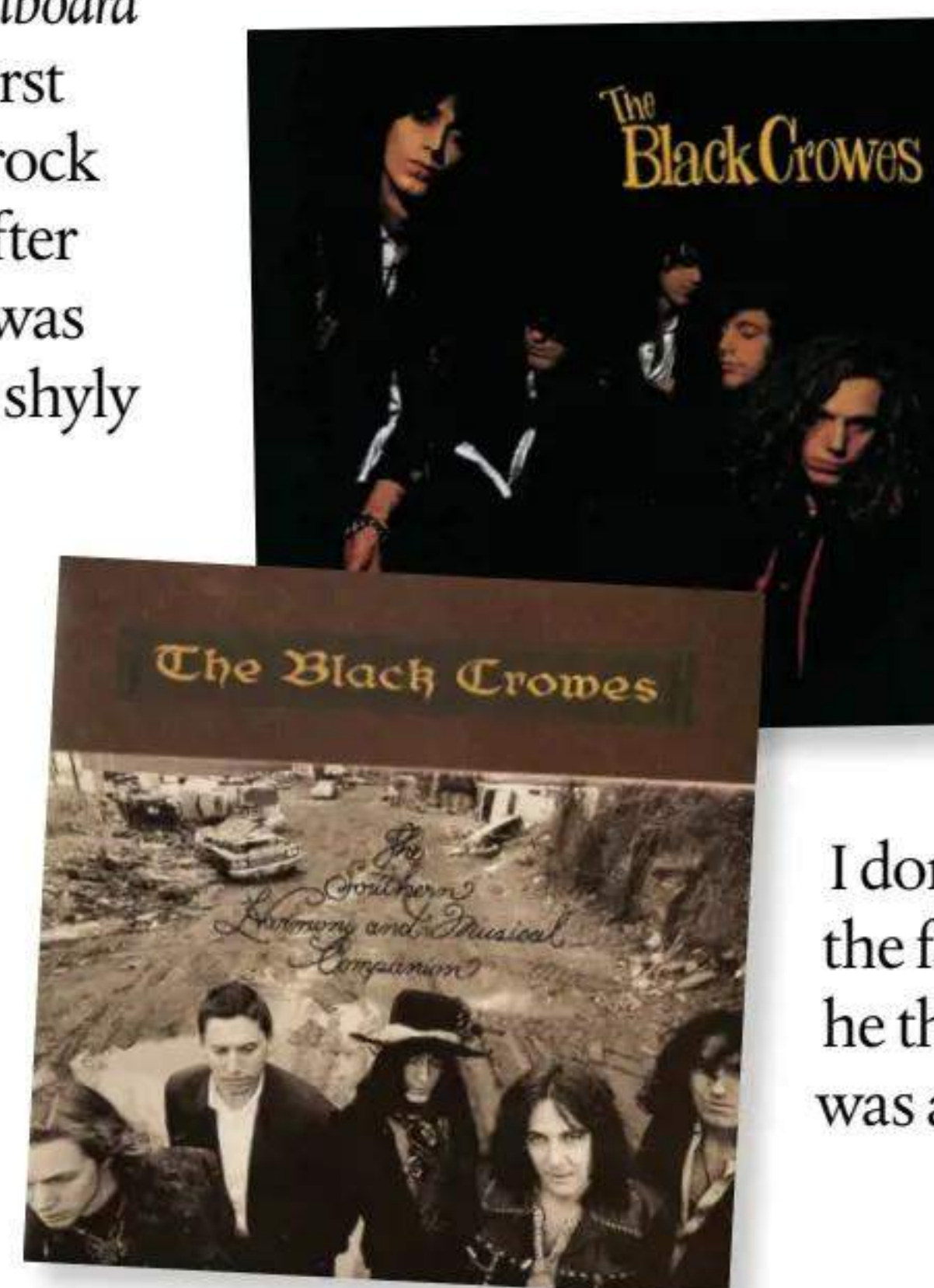
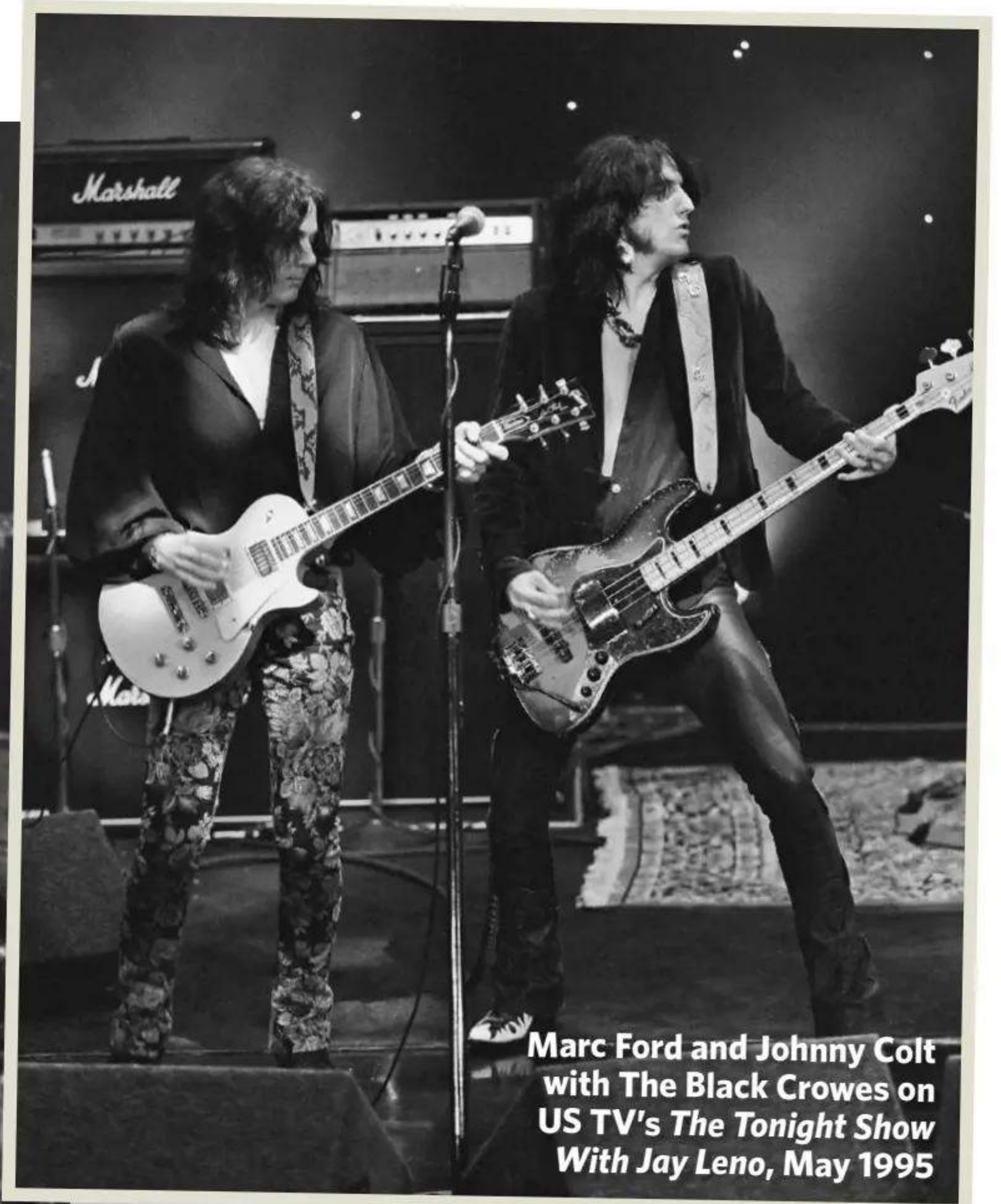
Chris Robinson: Dad playing guitar and music. That would be the one thing different from having breakfast or playing in the yard. Music made the space around me different. My dad travelled for a living. He’d given up his folk career by then, so when he came home at weekends he’d play records. Saturday morning would start off with folk records and move into Crosby, Stills And Nash and Joe Cocker’s *Mad Dogs And Englishmen*. Then Sly And The Family Stone and dancing around. That was like heaven.

Rich Robinson: Dad had one of those console stereos in our living room. It was wooden and you opened it up. The turntable was in there, and built-in speakers. He loved *Carry On From Déjà Vu* by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. Even back then, that sound hit me. The resonance and the vibration of the harmony. The beauty of it. We moved around. We went to live up in Charlotte, North Carolina for a while. Those kinds of things were a little traumatic. Dad’s guitar was in the living room the whole time. Whenever people came over, he would play, and he and mum would sing. It was a thing.

Were your parents encouraging of your musical aspirations?

Chris: No. And I can’t blame them. My dad truly thought I could not sing. But also, Rich and I were listening to The Gun Club and X, and Michael Stipe and Paul Westerberg.

I don’t think my dad ever understood the fact singers didn’t have to be what he thought a singer was any more. Dad was a very good singer, but he wasn’t





Early flight: The Black Crowes in 1990.

“We would be the last generation to understand the fking beauty of being bored and of the wandering mind just falling into something.”**

Chris Robinson

a writer. He wasn't driven to the strange or bizarre. Whereas as a teenager I was interested in Rimbaud and Baudelaire and listening to Thelonious Monk and Ornette Coleman records. That part of me was, I think, always annoying to my parents. I had severe dyslexia, but I could suffer the slings and arrows of teachers thinking I was dim because I had this whole other active world in my mind.

Rich: Trying to get information out of dad about his past and his family was difficult. He lived in the now. I think he'd had some sort of shady dealings where he hadn't been paid royalties. There was something that bothered him about his time in the business. I think he wanted to shield us from that. He was definitely supportive. If our band had a gig, he'd give us the keys to his van and his credit card. But I think he wanted something else for us as well. He basically said to me: "Here's three chords, now you figure out the rest."

When you started making music with each other, what were you seeking?

Rich: I don't know. We just got some instruments and began playing. We instantly started to write songs. We weren't very good, and we didn't know how to play. I started late. A lot of guitar players start much earlier, at five or six. Chris was more of an expeditionary. He'd go out and find and bring music home, whereas I'd pick what I liked and then obsess over those things. I remember we used to make fun of rednecks in our first songs. Punk rock wasn't big among the redneck population.

Chris: I wanted to take the pressure off in my psyche. I needed to identify with something, and the hero was important to somebody like me. It's like Jack Kerouac wrote in *On The Road*; I wanted to be with the mad ones. I knew I wasn't alone, and isn't that the point of so much rock'n'roll? When I first heard Big Star it hit me like a ton of bricks. Alex Chilton, Gram Parsons and Syd

Barrett all came into my life at the same time. Personally, I wanted to tap into that creative feeling. We would be the last generation to understand the fucking beauty of being bored and of the wandering mind just falling into something.

What was the first thing to strike you about your brother as a performer?

Chris: Our first little band, there was a kid down the street who had a bass, so he was in. My cousin was playing drums. Then there was a kid with a guitar at my junior high who had Byrds records. We were going to learn some stuff from the first couple of Byrds albums. Rich is my little brother, and he also has a guitar, so he came down to the basement and said: "Well, I'm playing along too." We rehearsed once or twice, and the next time the guy from my school didn't show and it was just Rich. It wasn't great, but it was something. We realised we didn't need the other guy. ➤

THE BLACK CROWES



Early birds: The Black Crowes (with Chuck Leavell on organ) on US TV show *Saturday Night Live*, March 1991.

“Hey, this band is something I really love, but it’s also broken my heart.”

Chris Robinson

Rich: Chris was always kind of the mouthpiece. He had the gift of the gab, as they say. He always had friends, and he could maintain and entertain a group of people. I always found it much harder to do that because of who I am as a person. Translate that from a social setting and put yourself on stage, and it was amazing to me how he would be able to even speak to an audience. I was always really shy and crushingly sensitive. He was just naturally good at communicating with an audience.

Yet by the time you released your first album, *Shake Your Money Maker*, you each came across as being so absolutely self-assured and certain of what you stood for?

Rich: It was our shield. We felt like it was our superpower, in a sense. That music

meant so much to us, we were like: “This is the best shit on the planet right now.” It was sacred. It was powerful because of our reverence for it, and we unabashedly played it and lived it.

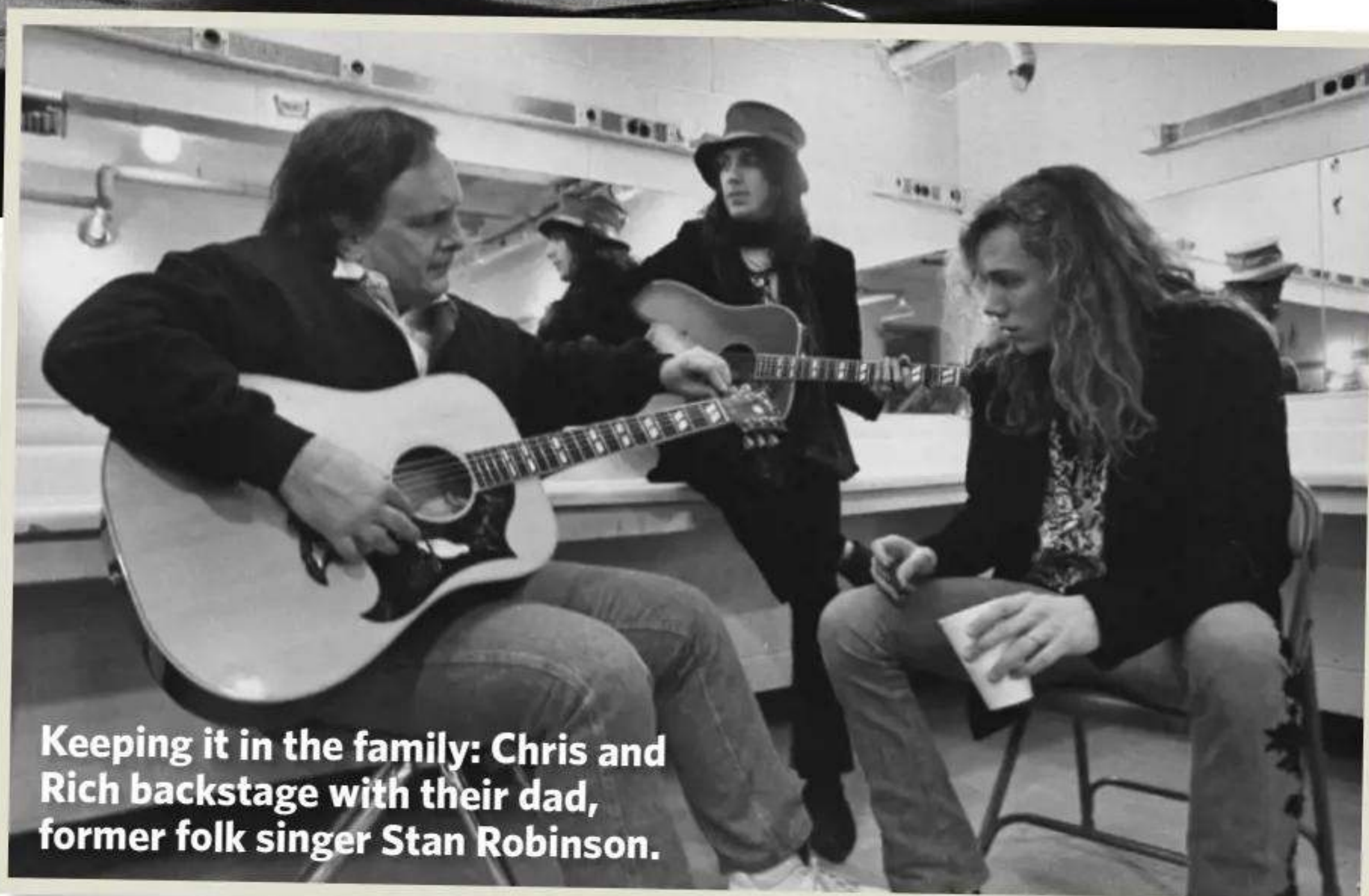
Chris: Part of that was just a survival and safety thing. Anything else would’ve been a crack in the hull and we’d have had to deal with taking on water.

How did you balance the good and bad aspects of that first flush of great success?

Chris: The first decade of The Black Crowes is maybe the last rock’n’roll decade and where it has a certain cultural importance. We were just gonna take this ride for all

the juice we could squeeze out of it. I think we also had a bit of the old

punk-rock attitude, in the tradition of we were anti-authority, we’re creative, we had a lot of middle-class suburban anger for whatever reason. As naïve as it sounds, we wanted to make a statement of the fact we didn’t have to play the game.



Keeping it in the family: Chris and Rich backstage with their dad, former folk singer Stan Robinson.

Rich: An opportunity came along, we jumped on it, and we fucking held on for dear life. We didn’t question it. We didn’t stop to reflect. I was twenty years old when the record was taking off. No one’s going to tell a twenty-year-old anything. There was no hesitation or forethought, we just did.

On any of the eight days you were recording *The Southern Harmony*, what was going down?

Rich: We came off *Shake Your Money Maker* after three hundred and fifty shows and eighteen months of solid touring. I mean, we were constantly playing. What that does to a person, I’d grown as a guitar player and as an artist. Everyone in the band grew. Chris and I had been writing the whole time. We were on fire as a band.

Chris: Those were the true golden days. We had these new tools, and we weren’t under the scrutiny of not knowing. *Shake Your Money Maker* – that’s the first time I’m singing on a microphone in the studio. *The Southern Harmony* is only the second time. Our thing was to be excited. Like: “Why can’t rock’n’roll be what we want it to be?” We were very confident. We knew these were fucking good songs. We knew nothing really sounded, or looked, like we did at the time. The other part is,



we were always trying to be in the moment. A lot of bands are cleverer about looking down the road. We're outsider people. Depression is a real thing for us. We were self-medicating. You just have to fucking stay on the ride. You couldn't ever stop, because if you did it would all go away.

At the time, you seemed to often be affronted whenever other bands didn't share your puritanical streak. Who was the biggest let-down?

Rich: Ultimately, I think Chris got most disappointed by some of his heroes, and seeing the smoke and mirrors sometimes used. It hurt his feelings, in a sense. I was a little more disconnected from the people. I could still look at the product of their creativity, at their music, and appreciate it for what it was, separate from the human beings. Chris was more like: "What the fuck are these people doing?" Then again, there were times we weren't let down. Touring with AC/DC, man, there's not any backing tracks and those guys were fucking killing it every night. Touring with the Stones. Fuck, to see that band on fire, that was one of the best things ever. Those things made up for the disappointments in spades.

Chris: Authenticity is, to me, the difference between what I feel is real and can get behind, and what's pretentious. I still feel that. At the time, I chalk it up to passion. No one could take away our passion.

We were on *Saturday Night Live* two times. The second time was during *The Southern Harmony*. You get to play two songs. *Sometimes Salvation* was the single, and they also wanted us to do *Remedy*. We'd just written a song, *Nonfiction*, for the next record, and we wanted to play it instead. The guy from SNL was like: "No." And I said to him: "You know what, man, what do you give a fuck about what we do? You'll have another band on next week, and one the week after." He told me we were making a big mistake. I said: "All I'm saying is it's our mistake to make." Someone told me recently the guy has a podcast now about his days on the show, and he said we were the



Rich and Chris on the *Southern Harmony* tour, circa '92.

worst people he ever had to deal with. Cool. Good. At that time in my life it was us versus them at every moment. You know what? He was right. If we'd have played *Remedy* it would have turned out different. But we didn't, and everybody's still here.

Having set the band to such high ideals, did you ever disappoint yourself?

"Chris will walk into a war. He'll jump straight in. And I've always appreciated that about him."

Rich Robinson

Rich: No. We made a lot of decisions that shot us in the foot commercially, because our principles went against it. Now, it's changed. People don't give a shit any more. They'll license or sell anything. There's something gross about the encroachment of the corporate world. Isn't there enough of that shit in our lives? Shouldn't music be an oasis?

After the 'golden days' of the early 90s, the Robinsons' course has never again been smooth, or so straightforward-seeming. Neither of the two Black Crowes albums immediately following *The Southern Harmony* – *America* in 1994 and *Three Snakes And One Charm* two years later – sold nearly so well. Combinations of heavy drugs, unchecked egos, and their sibling rivalry toxified matters.

In 2002, sick of and exhausted by each other, the Crowes crumbled into a three-year-long hiatus. Reactivated in 2005, they would lurch on together for a further eight years, various line-ups coming and going, and before the ghost was given up once more in 2013 the principals as riven as ever. Chris Robinson initiated what appeared likely to be their final break-up, demanding a bigger slice of the band's monies than his brother. In his telling, he didn't ever expect to get it, but it was the only way he could think up of derailing them for good.

For both brothers, in the interims there have been an abundance of solo records, other bands and different collaborations. Nothing, though, has resonated nearly so much as their work ➤

THE BLACK CROWES



The Black Crowes supporting Metallica in Belgium in '93.

together, and no matter how racked their relationship at any given time. For all the strife attending their making, both *Amorica* and *Three Snakes* have grown in stature. Each one haunted and spooked, but thrilling in their abandon and sheer wilfulness. All the way up to 2009's *Before The Frost... Until The Freeze* (ostensibly cut live in the Woodstock barn of the late, great Levon Helm of The Band), the last all-new Crowes album prior to *Happiness Bastards*, the Robinsons have sparked off no one so much as off each other.

In retrospect, was the period covering *Amorica* and *Three Snakes* an especially creative one?

Chris: Incredibly creative. Rich and I wrote a lot of songs at that time, enough for three records around *Amorica*. It was a dark time. Kurt Cobain had blown his

head off and everyone was on heroin. Rich and I are both cerebral people, but when it comes to music it's always related to how we're feeling when we're making it. There was no self-editing in a lot of those songs. I think *Amorica* sounds incredible. That record starts with the song *Gone*. That was the real manifesto as to where I was personally, and where I thought we were. Half of the band was living a certain way, and then Rich and Steve Gorman [drums] didn't do drugs. They were married and already like soccer dads. Johnny [Colt, bass] was kind of off on his own. Then there was Marc [Ford, guitar], Ed [Harsch, keyboards], and me, and the whole surrounding cast.

Rich: The musical climate was shifting, and so were we. Chris and my relationship started to change. It was a downer period. There was a lot of weird shit going on. *Amorica* was almost an anti-commercial record. We'd made Rick Rubin a shit-ton of money. And we always said if you make someone a bunch of

money, they're going to want you to keep doing it. With *Amorica*, people didn't like the title, they didn't like the album cover. They started to come around to the studio. I can't speak for Chris, but it wasn't a positive experience for me. There was a lot of depression for me. I wrote a bunch of heavy songs. Beautiful, but heavy fucking songs. They were representative of how I felt.

What was your artistic high point of that first era of the band?

Rich: One of my favourite records is *Three Snakes*. It's raw emotion. *Amorica* was intense and dark also, but *Three Snakes* was almost too intense and sad for me.

Chris: For *Three Snakes* it was a heavy drug period. We built a studio in this house in Atlanta, and half of us were living there – the bad half of

the band. We made the record there, and we felt it was done. Then the management and the record label came along and said no it isn't. So we ended up moving out to LA and doing a month of overdubs. It's always been a disappointment to me. Maybe they were trying to sonically erase the desperation, but that's what's beautiful about those songs. I'd love to find some of the original mixes. A song like *Nebakanezer* is pretty autobiographical [sample lyric: '*Nebakanezer... left his needle outside in the rain... Spent most of his time making holes and licking his wounds*']. It was early days still, but it was the first time I realised: "Hey, this band is something I really love, but it's also broken my heart."

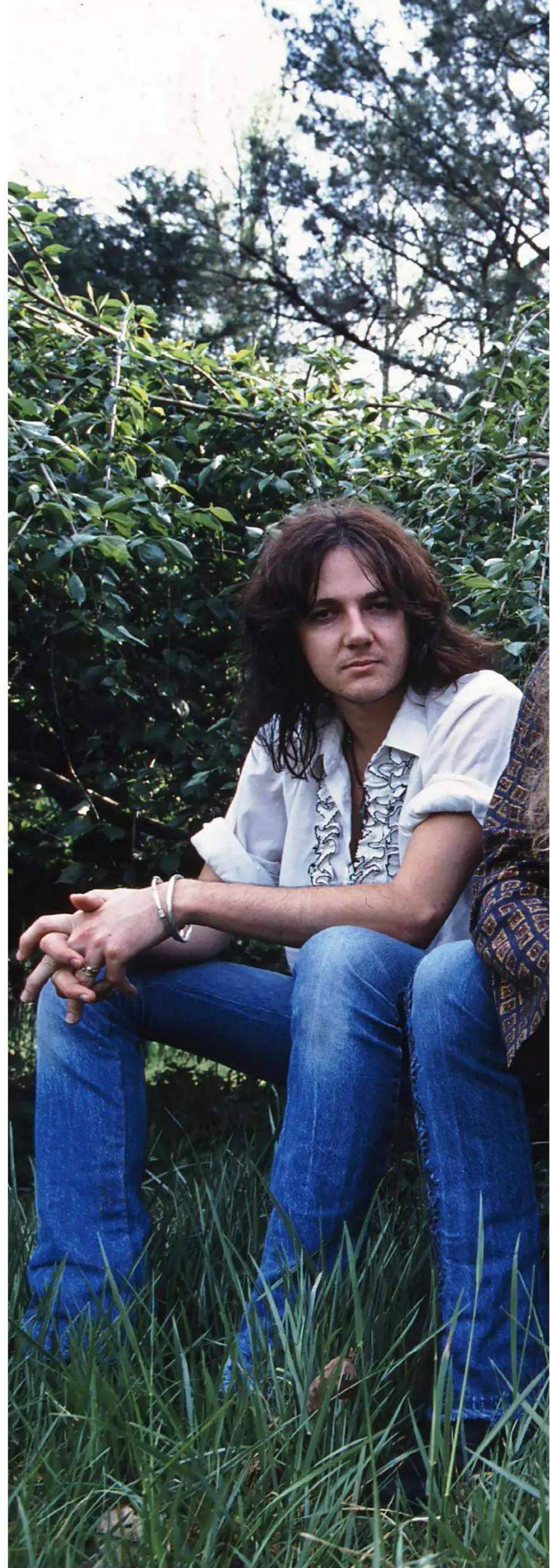
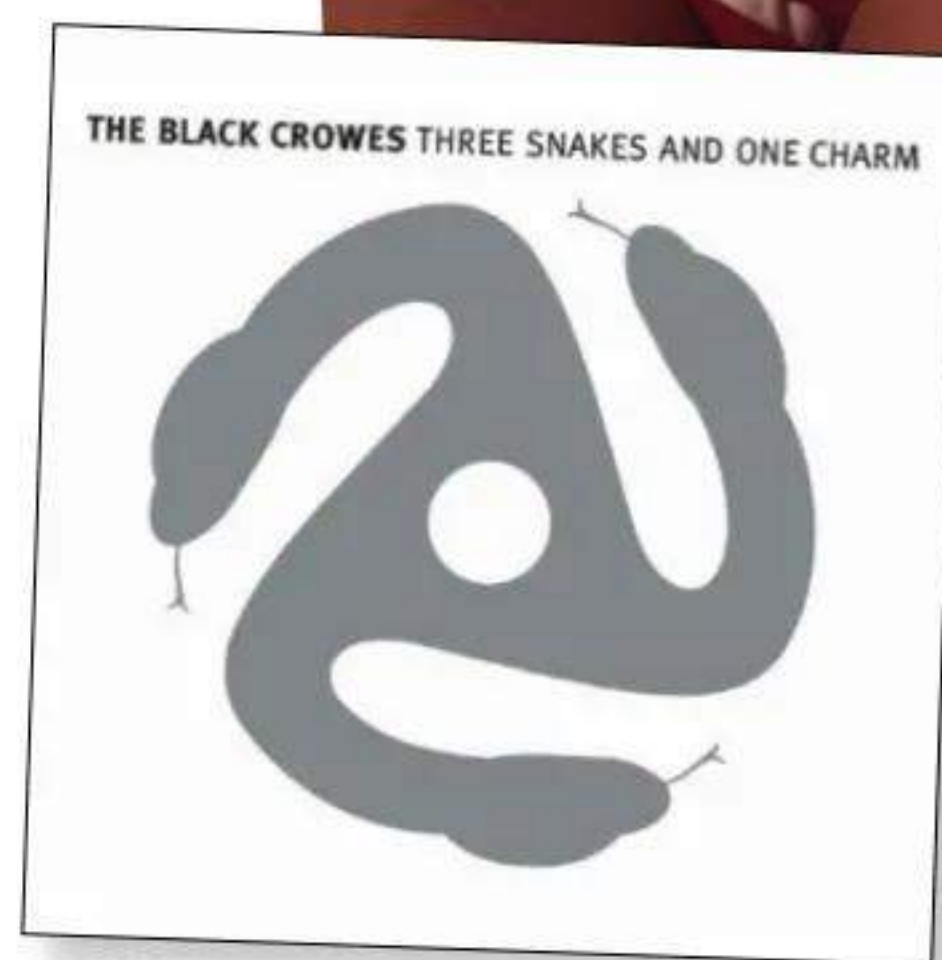
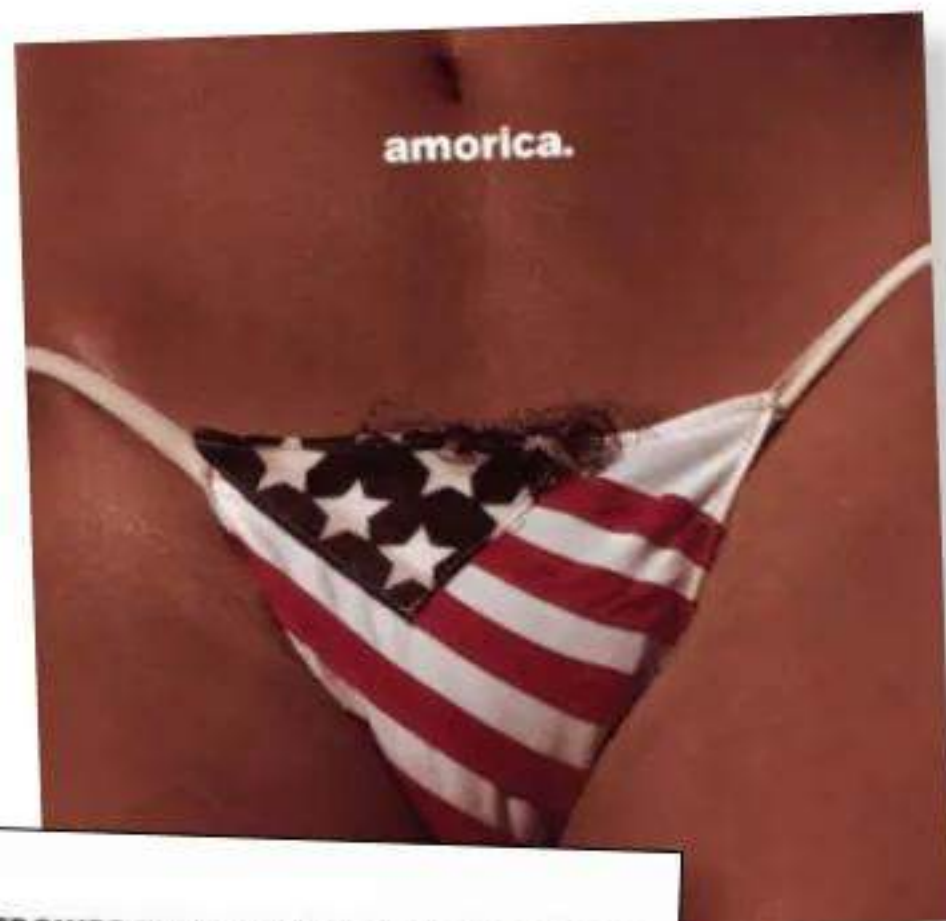
That record has a lot of heartbreak on it. Not romantic heartbreak, but philosophical, metaphysical heartbreak.

The low point being?

Rich: I don't think there was a creative low point. Look, we did what we wanted to do. I thought

"Isn't there enough shit in our lives? Shouldn't music be an oasis?"

Rich Robinson



those first four records were brilliant. I couldn't have been happier with them.

Chris: You know, I laugh when people talk about Jim Morrison being such a dick. He wasn't a dick. He was twenty-seven years old. Fuck, isn't that what your twenties are for? You're talking about crazy people. Rock'n'roll used to be full of fucking maniacs. There wasn't an old rock'n'roller you'd listen to that hadn't been arrested for something. In the 2000s it started to be different. But when I look back at the 1990s with us, it's like: "Of course." It makes perfect sense to me.

What, if anything, had changed between the two of you when you got the band back together in 2005?

Rich: Not a lot. That was kind of the problem.



The Black Crowes in 1992: (l-r) Marc Ford, Rich Robinson, Eddie Harsch, Chris Robinson, Steve Gorman, Johnny Colt.

There wasn't a reckoning. It was almost like we'd simply had a time out. I had my own experiences. I put together a band and it fell apart. I scored a movie [2002 crime drama *Highway*, starring Jake Gyllenhaal], put out a solo record, and did a lot of painting and art shows. So from my perspective that was cool. But I was getting back together with the band as my first marriage was falling apart, and so that was fucking shitty to say the least. Then I realised the band hadn't changed, and all of the same bullshit was still there. All of the same people were causing the same shit. Chris and I were not in a good place. It was just negative and abusive. Inevitably, it fell apart again because we'd never dealt with the core issues.

Chris: There was a lot of lip service about it being

different, I think. A lot of it has to do also with the people around you. I'm not angry or resentful about anything that's ever happened, because that's the way it's supposed to be. That's how shit is laid out.

"I know I'm a mental case. It's very charming that Rich thinks he's not."

Chris Robinson

In spite of all the rancour, the two of you were still able to gather yourselves to make something as vaulting, and undimmed, as *Before The Frost*.

Chris: That record has some of my favourite

songs Rich and I have ever written. It was such a fucking cool idea. I always wanted to make a live record of new songs, but I didn't know how to do it until I went to a 'Midnight Ramble' at Levon's place. When Rich and I started to write the songs, it was fantastic. What we did is write and record studio versions in the week, and on the weekend we had the gigs at Levon's. The gigs were great. But then we went from a really good place of writing and being cordial, to within a few days it being like a big 'Fuck you', and fighting. Typical of the way Rich and I worked together. The writing was always very easy.

Rich: For that record, we started writing songs for the first time on our own as well. It didn't feel as collaborative. It was a lot more separate. ➤

THE BLACK CROWES



The Before The Frost (2009) line-up:
(l-r) Steve Gorman, Luther Dickinson,
Adam MacDougall, Chris Robinson,
Sven Pipien, Rich Robinson.

Altogether, six long years elapsed without a single word passing between the Robinsons. When they did finally agree to meet up again, at first tentatively and over breakfast at the Chateau Marmont hotel in Los Angeles, they'd each had children who'd grown up never having laid eyes on their respective uncles or cousins. Their Hollywood breakfast occasioned a full-scale reunion of The Black Crowes, albeit with the two of them as the only original members left standing.

In 2020 they embarked on a 46-date tour to mark the 30th anniversary of *Shake Your Money Maker*. Bitter experience may have forewarned them to expect the unexpected, but not to have their comeback interrupted by a global pandemic.

Emerging out of it, *Happiness Bastards* is ushering in another tour. Opening at the storied Grand Ol' Opry in Nashville on April 2 and (extreme events notwithstanding) set to visit 35 cities in North America and Europe. "We have actual business meetings now," remarks Chris, saucer-eyed. "I mean, it's great, and amazing."

Have you learnt anything new about each other these past four years?

Chris: I'm in a different place of trying to have more empathy and be more understanding of my brother. When I was younger, I didn't realise the severity of Rich's social anxiety. I didn't have the time or perspective to think about it, or to give a fuck. I was just like: "What's wrong with him?" We would build up resentments about that, because in a sense we were adolescents still. On top of it, we're almost English in terms of dealing

with our emotions, because we're from Georgia, and Atlanta especially. Mick Jagger said Atlanta was the most English place he'd ever been outside of England in terms of attitudes.

Rich: As you grow older, you change with how you see the world in general. And we've been on a pretty long journey. Forty years since I got my guitar, and we started playing in our basement, seems crazy to me. To think of the arc and the scope of the thing is pretty far out, but it's really all I know. Chris sings like Chris. He doesn't sound like anyone else. I play like me, and I don't sound like anyone else. We're both of us still curious and in love with music.

What's been missing whenever you've worked with someone other than your brother?

Chris: It's been the same thing right up to this last record. Rich will play me something and it'll prick up my ears. It inspires me to do what I do, which is pick up a piece of paper and start finding an image and the right melody for the song. I've done that with other people as well, but never in the way Rich and I can suddenly start doing it. It must be because we were in the same house.

Rich: Whenever I write

songs, I just subconsciously write for his voice. Writing a song and having it come to fruition has always been my favourite thing. The challenging part is trying to make it work, but I've always had a conviction that it will. We just have to find the right spices. There's a musical gift Chris has of being able to write off my rhythm and understand it innately. That's always a cool thing.

The six years you didn't talk to each other. What do you regret the most?

Rich: I don't really have any regrets. We needed that time to get to this place. Sometimes you need silence to be able to stop and truly see something clearly. What it did for me, it also gave me my own experiences through which to really figure out my part in all of it. I broke away for a long time, so I was able to come back into The Black Crowes as more of a confident and whole person.

Chris: It is what it is, and it had to be the way it was to get us to where we are. I'm a firm believer

in that. But there were a few personal things... a medical thing I didn't know about. Rich had his own family and everything, but I'm sure he was scared, and I was his brother, and I wasn't there for him. That hurt. But I'm an adult, and I can live with it, and make up for it. It won't happen again. We're there for each other. We hardly ever

talk on the phone, but I love to cook, and he calls if ever he wants a recipe.

And what do you now love your brother for the most?

Rich: That's an interesting question. I guess this is more of a youthful thing, but it's more the times when he recognises the brother in me. Not a little brother, but a brother, and the fact we're in this together and we've done this together. Also his ability to just be him. Chris will walk into war. He'll jump straight in, and I've always appreciated that about him.

Chris: I love that he doesn't realise how crazy he is, too. I know I'm a mental case. It's very charming that Rich thinks he's not. I love my brother because he's incredibly sweet and very sincere. He's a very special musician. I love his sensitivity. Show biz wants to take that away from you at all costs, and Rich has never let it happen. I think that's really wonderful.

From the forty-year journey of the band, which former member do you miss the most?

Rich: There's a ton of people I miss. That was always hard for me. You get used to people. I did like Johnny Colt. Johnny handled himself well when he left. He didn't rag on us. But the biggest one now is Eddie Harsch [Harsch died on November 4, 2016, aged 59]. Everyone in the band always had reverence for his abilities. The



"Depression is a real thing for us. We were self-medicating. You just have to stay on the fking ride."**

Chris Robinson



Chris Robinson and (top to bottom) Johnny Colt, Chris Robinson, Eddie Harsch.

“I love my brother because he’s incredibly sweet and very sincere. He’s a very special musician.”

Chris Robinson

other day, Chris and I were in Georgia, in the studio, and listening to old tracks from *Southern Harmony*. Man, to solo Eddie’s tracks... That guy was such a deep player. He was a funny, kind person. I always stayed in touch with him after he left the band.

If you were able to go back and impart one piece of advice to the teenage you, what would it be?

Rich: I’m not sure my fourteen-year-old self would listen, but I would encourage myself to enjoy it more. To take time and really appreciate it, instead of putting your head down and ploughing through.

Chris: I wouldn’t fix anything. Everyone’s trying to go tell it to the mountain, but we all take a different route to get there. I was in New York the day before yesterday, and I took a long walk.

I walked past apartments where friends who are no longer with us lived. All sorts of weird things came flooding back. But you can’t escape adversity. You have to make mistakes. It’s all a learning process.

Did the teenage you get everything he wanted?

Rich: I don’t know. I think in a sense he did, but sometimes when you get what you want, maybe it’s also not what you thought it would be. So yes and no. When you’re a teenager your aspiration is: “I wish I could play stadiums for the rest of my life.” In my opinion now, there’s a richer life experience to be had. Our path has been very mountainous, with a lot of highs and lows. You can’t see how high you were until you can look up, and vice versa.

Chris: I’m prone to decadence and drawn to the shadows, but overall it’s a wonderful life. A few

years ago I lost a dear friend, a musician. My daughter was very young at the time, and she saw me crying. She asked me why I was crying. I said to her: “Because my friend is gone, and I loved him. But I’m also crying with joy, because don’t ever forget, your dad’s a musician and my friend was a musician, and nobody gets to laugh like we have laughed, and have that vibration.” The grand adventure rock’n’roll has given me is the other reason I was crying. The characters I’ve met. The bipolar fucking weirdos, addicted, beautiful souls, the madness, and the sadness. It’s just too much. Like Steve Marriott said: ‘*It’s all too beautiful.*’ That’s a fucking fact. As for the teenager in the basement getting what he wanted, I’m gonna paraphrase Muddy Waters – I can never be satisfied! 🎸

Happiness Bastards is available now via Silver Arrow Records.

FOLLOW THE FELLOW WHO FOLLOWS A DREAM

In December 1973, *Elton John* finished a triumphant 13-date UK tour. It capped off an extraordinary year in which his album *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* reinforced in some style his status as a global superstar.

Words: **Mick Wall**

'There were several roads nearby, but it did not take Dorothy long to find the one paved with yellow bricks. Within a short time, she was walking briskly toward the Emerald City; her silver shoes tinkling merrily on the hard, yellow roadbed.'

The Wonderful Wizard Of Oz, 1900

July 1973. It can now be confirmed. Elton John's rocket ship has officially left Earth's atmosphere. His latest hit-laden album, *Don't Shoot Me I'm Only the Piano Player*, released at the start of the year, is his second in a row to top the charts in both Britain and America. Now his uncharacteristically barnstorming new single *Saturday Night's Alright For Fighting* is in the UK Top 10, and Elton is on his way to becoming an authentic rock god – bigger than The Beatles; stranger than the Stones; more glitter than Gary. The transformation begun when *Crocodile Rock*, already a hit here, gave him his first US No.1 single in February. In Britain, just 12 months before, Elton was still a one-hit wonder known for *Your Song*. In America his fame was more widespread but still anchored in bearded singer-songwriter mode, respectfully bespectacled crooner of *Your Song* and its more knowing companion *Tiny Dancer*.

Saturday Night's Alright is his fifth major hit since *Rocket Man* unlocked the doors to the world's singles charts the previous summer. Resulting TV appearances sporting ever more bizarre eyewear and a no-limits attitude to on-stage costumery unseen since the diamond daze of Liberace have transformed public perception of the singer from earnest musical artisan to glammed-up, arena-headlining rock star.

"It felt like there was an unstoppable momentum behind me."

Elton John

Elton John is 26 and will never be so high again. High in the charts, high on the recent launch of his own record label, Rocket Records, high on his new name, now legally changed to Elton Hercules John. (Hercules because it was the name of the horse in the TV sitcom *Steptoe And Son* and Elton was a fan, true story.) Soon to be even higher on a new grand passion: cocaine.

Inside, though, he is still chubby four-eyed Reggie Dwight, the insecure closeted teen from a broken home. As he confessed in his 2019 memoir, *Me*, despite becoming the biggest-selling star in the world in the early 70s, he was always filled with "self-loathing".

"There was no solitude, no reflection," he confessed. "I was still the little boy from Pinner Hill Road underneath

it all." Nobody would have guessed it from seeing him on *Top Of The Pops*, dressed in spangly bover boots and braces, pounding on the piano on *Saturday Night's Alright* like Jerry Lee Lewis on black-and-white TV in 1957.

That single is up to No.7, and even butch Slade and Mott The Hoople fans are stomping their platforms and shaking out their dandruff to it. No one believes for a second that Elton is really a bottle-wielding brawler with 'a bellyful of beer' any more than they believe his mate Marc Bolan is really a magic elf. But these are still the smoke-filled days when you must fight for your right to be on the UK's biggest TV music show. You might be David Bowie with *Life On Mars*, but you are more likely to be Alvin Stardust with *My Coo Ca Choo*. Elton John wishes to appeal to both sets of fans.

Now his wish is coming true. His real journey has finally begun. He's travelling the yellow brick road, destination: Emerald City, where everything is the colour of jewelled greenbacks. ➤





Elton and his lyricist Bernie Taupin receive gold discs in 1973 for four of their co-written albums.



Elton and manager John Reid attend the opening of the Roxy Theatre in Hollywood, September 19, 1973.

Elton John may have reinvented himself as a singles star, but everyone knew it was his albums where the real treasure was to be found. He'd never made a bad one, had the gold records in America to show for it. Now the unexpected leap from the gloomy prog-rock of *Madman Across the Water* in 1971 to the swaggering confidence of the glorious *Honky Château* in '72 had led to a brace of multimillion-selling albums and no less than five multimillion-selling singles in the space of barely a year.

With that journey leaving him so completely at ease in his new, more elevated role as rock star with a capital 'R', Elton now felt he could turn his hand to anything his writing partner Bernie Taupin's lyrics suggested.

His backing group – 22-year-old guitarist Davey Johnstone, 27-year-old bassist Dee Murray and 24-year-old drummer Nigel Olsson, soon to be formally named the Elton John Band – had a sound as instantly identifiable as T.Rex or Rod Stewart. His US label, MCA, thought he'd shit the bed when *Saturday Night's Alright* made only No.12 there. But the message got through. This was no longer weepy James Taylor-style soul-searching, this was rock'n'roll genocide à la The Who and Zeppelin.

Outwardly, Elton was on a roll. Inwardly he feared it might all just blow away any second. The only safeguard was to keep going and see how far his new ruby slippers could take him. To that end he had released five albums in the past three years. He had also already recorded the 17 songs that would comprise his seventh, from which *Saturday Night's Alright* was the first track to be launched like a fireball.

However, when he announced that his next album would be a double, enigmatically titled *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*, there was a sharp intake of breath. You had to admire the audacity, but surely a sturdy third to complete a *Honky*

Château-Don't Shoot Me triptych was the right move. MCA certainly thought so. But Elton knew better. The Beatles, he pointed out, "did the White Album and now we'll have our double too".

A double album in 1973 was more than an artistic statement, it was a status symbol, a collection demanding everybody's attention. Only rock giants made double albums. Dylan had framed the conversation in 1966 with *Blonde On Blonde*, as Hendrix would do in '68 with *Electric Ladyland*. The Stones followed suit in '72 with *Exile*

Kingston, Jamaica in January 1973 to begin working on *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*, they looked on it as an adventure. It wasn't until they arrived that the scale of that ultimately doomed enterprise sunk in.

Byron Lee's Dynamic Sounds Studio was a 180-degree turn from the elegant confines of the Château d'Hérouville where he'd made both *Honky Château* and *Don't Shoot Me*. The 18th-century Château was situated in lush French countryside 40 miles north of Paris. Converted

into a state-of-the-art 16-track residential recording facility in 1969 by the French experimental composer Michel Magne, it boasted 30 rooms, outbuildings, a swimming pool and a tennis court. Gourmet meals would be prepared every night by the resident chef, and fine wines procured from local vineyards.

Dynamic Sounds, once the home of Bob Marley's Wailers, Toots And The Maytals and other herbaceous reggae pioneers, was a hot, dusty compound full of out-of-date gear and unsettling vibes. Producer Gus Dudgeon had ordered a raft of new equipment to be ready for when they arrived, but it never showed up. Elton's grand piano didn't arrive either, and the cobwebby old studio piano was a joke. The disconcertingly downcast mood was not helped by the facility having 24-hour armed guards patrolling the barbed wire perimeter.

Elton and entourage had arrived the morning after George Foreman knocked out Joe Frazier at Kingston's National Stadium in two brutal rounds for the boxing heavyweight championship of the world. Violence hung heavy over the city for days afterwards. With every hotel overflowing, Elton found himself billeted at the Pink Flamingo Hotel, in the middle of teeming Kingston, while everybody else was taken to a luxurious resort location across the island in Ocho Rios.

**"I was a horny twenty-three-year-old...
I was basically writing about my
fantasies at the time."**

Bernie Taupin

On Main St. All stone-cold classics. Conferring the kind of cachet no amount of money can buy.

Now Elton wanted his music to be exalted in the same way. Only one caveat: if you were going to release a double album in 1973, it had better be better than good. It had better be fucking good.

Yet Elton denied he was under pressure. "It felt like there was an unstoppable momentum behind me," he said.

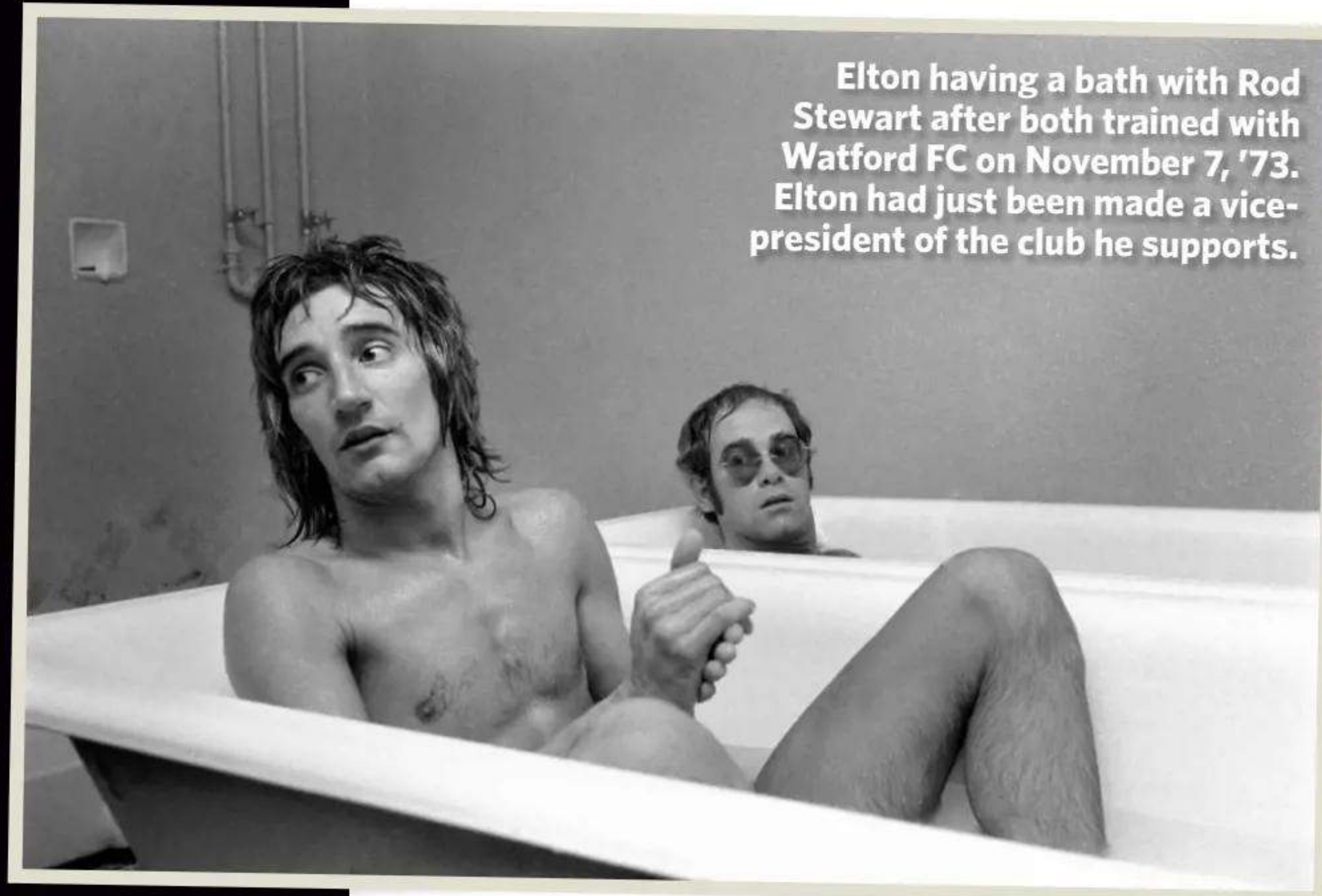
When Elton and his travelling band arrived in



Triple threat: Elton, Marc Bolan and Ringo Starr.



Plenty to shout about: Elton at one of the three sold-out shows at London's Hammersmith Odeon in December '73.



Elton having a bath with Rod Stewart after both trained with Watford FC on November 7, '73. Elton had just been made a vice-president of the club he supports.

With a 35-date summer US tour booked to begin in August, first single *Saturday Night's Alright* was released in July, the perfect crowd teaser. The clincher came in September with the second single, *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*. The cathedral-like title track of the forthcoming album was Elton John and Bernie Taupin at their bittersweetest, their most sepulchral yet somehow uplifting. Their giddy peak. Bernie using his countryside upbringing to characterise London life as a place 'where the dogs of society howl', all the while dreaming of 'going back to my plough'.

Half a century later it would be the last song Elton chose to sing every night on his Farewell Yellow Brick Road tour, elegiac and pure. Bernie's undisguised autobiography having evolved into Elton's musical epitaph, the yellow brick road the symbol of his journey from smalltown Pinner to big-time pop stardom.

The rest of the album was a jamboree of familiar Taupin tropes – mythmaking American yarns (*Roy Rodgers*; *The Ballad Of Danny Bailey* (1909-1934)); his parochial childhood, but with

a new twist (*Saturday Night's Alright* was less about horny-backed toads and more about the dodgy Lincolnshire dancehalls of his teens); the pitfalls of Hollyweird fame (*Candle In The Wind*: the working title of the album *Silent Movies*, *Talking Pictures*); and the sometimes coarse nature of love (the achingly poignant *I've Seen That Movie Too*).

There was also some of the most juvenile material Bernie had ever

asked Elton to put music and voice to: the grungy *Dirty Little Girl*, about, well, an ardent but unhygienic fan; *Social Disease*, the everyday tale of a bibulous tenant humping his landlady; *Sweet Painted Lady*, about a sailor's favourite port-in-a-storm prostitute; *All The Girls Love Alice*, about

a wistful teenage lesbian dreaming of 'two dykes in a go-go'.

"It is a pretty blue record," Bernie reflected years later. "I was a young kid, a horny twenty-three-year-old, among a lot of other horny

twenty-somethings... I was basically writing about my fantasies at the time."

There was also the 'problematic' to modern tastes *Jamaica Jerk-Off*, Elton chirruping in a faux 'islands' accent over a white-bread reggae lilt. But then Paul Simon, who recorded his 1972 hit *Mother And Child Reunion* at Dynamic the year before, had been similarly 'inspired'. As was



For Fighting and *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*. They just needed to be recorded. Once it became clear that wouldn't be happening at Dynamic, they fled to New York, chased to the airport by various shady Jamaican 'business figures', many of whom carried guns.

Better news awaited. The Château was available, opened again after a temporary closure.

"We weren't angels, but we didn't get dragged into the spotlight because Elton took the heat."

Guitarist Davey Johnstone

Recording began the moment they arrived back in France. Two weeks later they were done.

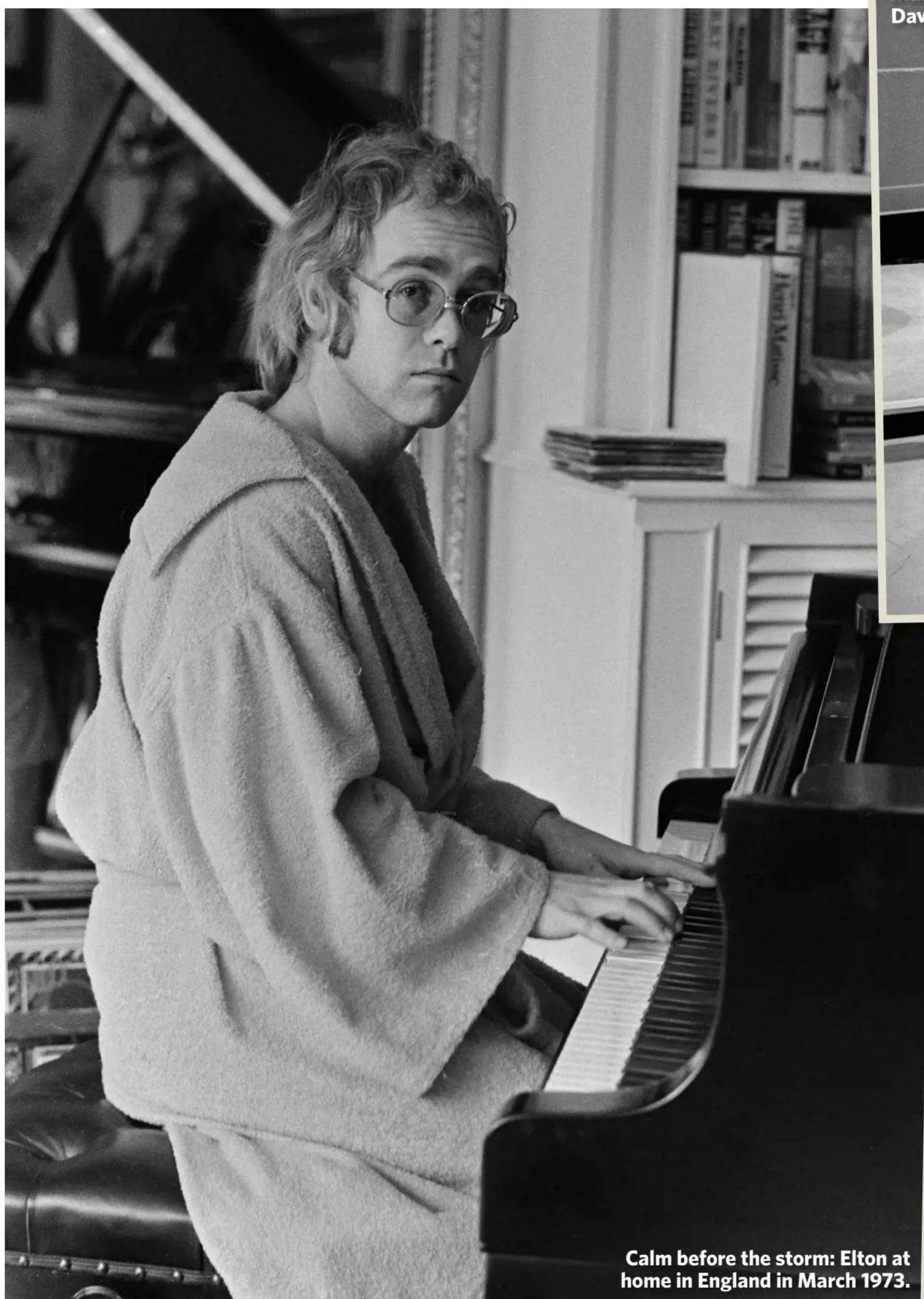
"It was insane," guitarist Davey Johnstone recalled when we spoke. "We were this factory, songwriting and recording together. As soon as we recorded it and released it, we'd take it straight out on tour. In the States especially it was just this giant unstoppable juggernaut."

Elton was too terrified to step outside the hotel. When news arrived that *Don't Shoot Me* had gone to No.1 in America, a celebration dinner was arranged at the Pink Flamingo. But Elton refused to join, and sulked in his room.

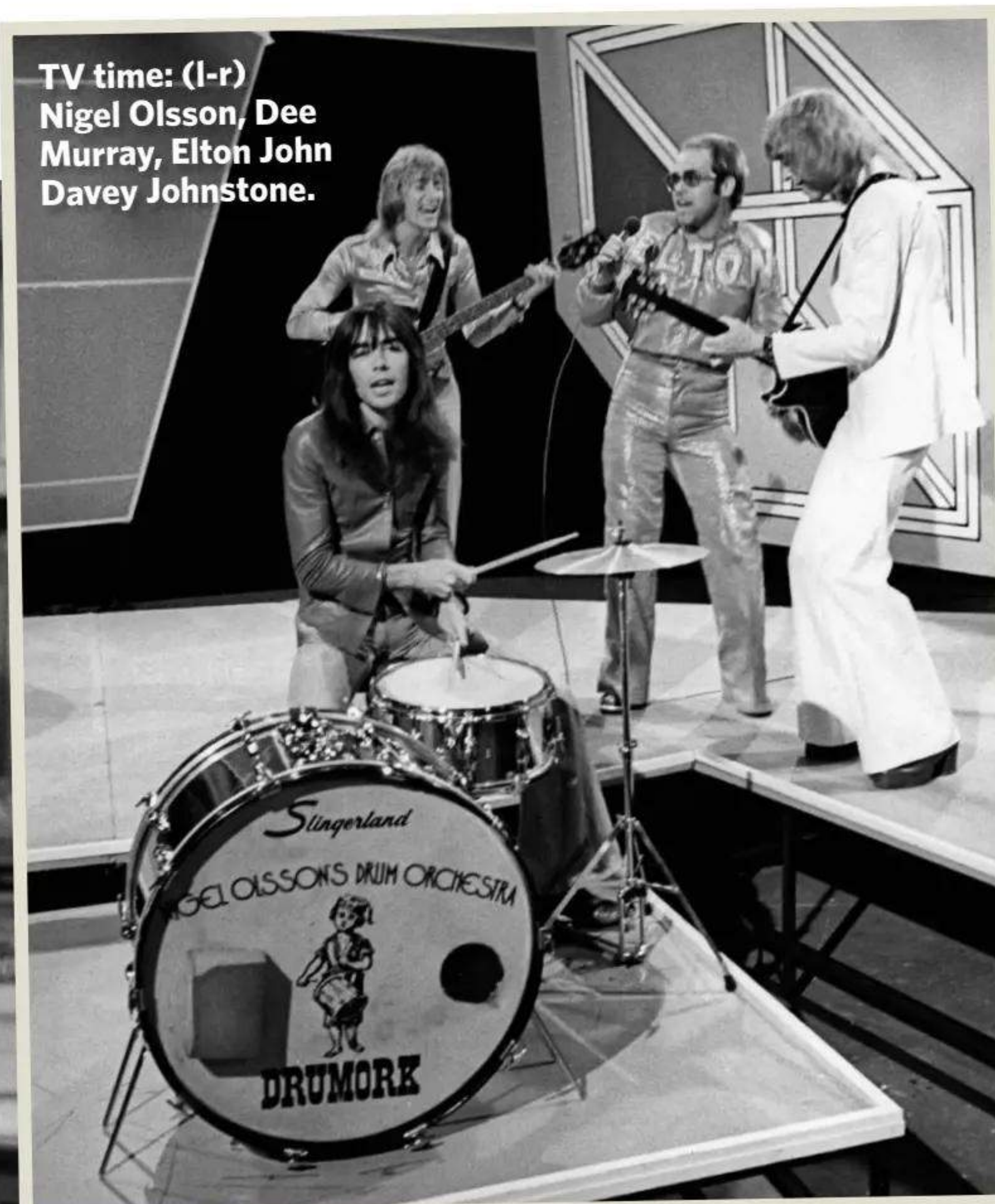
When he arrived for the first day's recording at Dynamic to find Gus and the band still trying to figure out how to make things work, it was the last straw. The vibes, man, they did not augur. "It's hard to see how they could have been," said Bernie Taupin, "with guards holding machine-guns outside the door."

Elton returned in a huff to the Pink Flamingo and didn't come out again for three days. Unable to sit still without worrying, he worked through a stack of new lyrics from Bernie. Dozens of sheets, neatly typed, that he sat alone in his room and wrote music for on a portable electric piano. By the morning of the fourth day he had 21 new songs, with titles including *Bennie And The Jets*, *Candle In The Wind*, *Saturday Night's Alright*

ELTON JOHN



Calm before the storm: Elton at home in England in March 1973.



TV time: (l-r) Nigel Olsson, Dee Murray, Elton John Davey Johnstone.



Elton performing at the launch party for his label Rocket Records at Moreton-in-Marsh village hall in Gloucestershire, April 26, 1973.

Mick Jagger when the Stones churned out their own 'reggae-influenced' track *Luxury*, also recorded at Dynamic.

On a double album comprised of 17 tracks, however, these were flimsy side salads adjacent on the plate to the juicy steaks of reputation-crowning moments like the 11-minute opus *Funeral for A Friend/Love Lies Bleeding*, a synth-laden prog overture that slowly builds into a bonfire of blazing cut-glass guitars, strategically detonating drums and a rhythmic hook so heavy it draws blood.

Next up, *Candle in The Wind*, Bernie's eulogy to Marilyn Monroe and one of Elton's finest ever ballads, Johnstone's guitar motif twinkling like the neon ooze of Sunset Strip at night. Another hit single in the UK in February '74, at first it wasn't released in America, where MCA surprisingly chose the jokey *Bennie And The Jets* instead.

Elton was not happy. "I said 'No, I want *Candle In The Wind*'. Guess who was wrong?"

For Elton, *Candle In The Wind* was class; *Bennie And The Jets* was throwaway. But when two R&B radio stations in Detroit started playing it and saw their listenership skyrocket, MCA made it Elton's

next single. The result, in April 1974, was his second American No.1 single, selling more than two million copies.

On *Bennie*, the deliberate-mistake piano intro had prompted Dudgeon to, as he put it, "fake-live this". Mixing in audience sounds from Elton's show at London's Royal Festival Hall a year before, along with audience crackle from Jimi Hendrix's performance at the 1970 Isle of Wight festival, and some ambient mayhem from an Elton show in Vancouver, it would become the second most famous song on *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* (see boxout on opposite page).

Other album highlights: *Grey Seal*, originally a fey B-side to Elton's 1970 flop single *Rock And Roll Madonna*, now reborn as a Bowie-meets-Beatles showstopper; the harum-scarum *Your Sister Can't Twist (But She Can Rock'n'Roll)*; saving the best for last, almost, with the gorgeously swooning closer *Harmony*.

Any of these could have been hit singles, and if this had been the CD-driven 80s they would have been. But these were still the two-vinyl-LPs-a-year 70s, and Elton had already recorded his next album, *Caribou*, due out just nine months

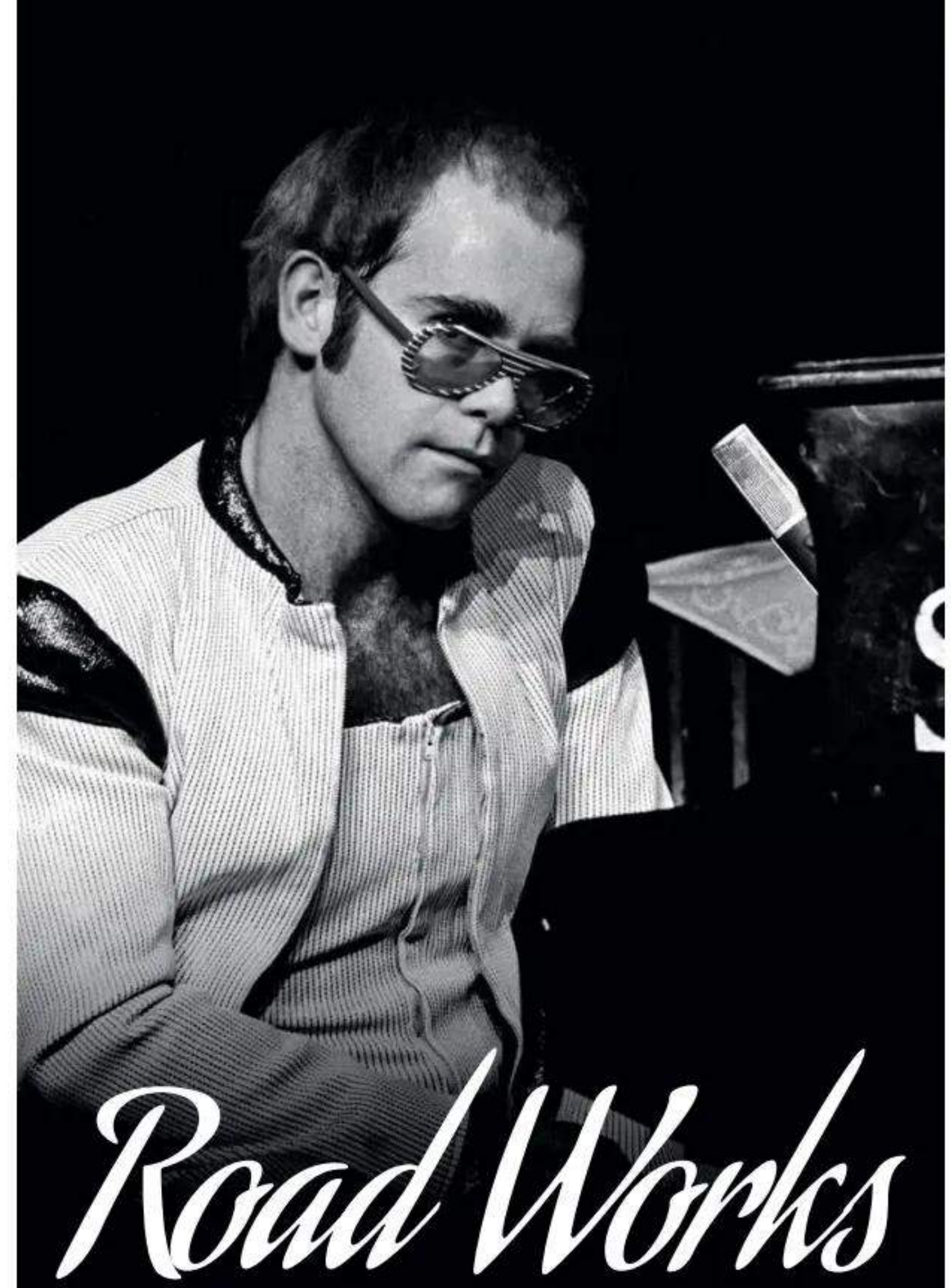
after *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*. There simply wasn't time for more singles.

Related in October 1973, *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* again topped both the UK and US charts (in the latter for eight consecutive weeks). As befitting its double-album eminence, it came in a lavish gatefold sleeve designed by illustrator and children's novelist Ian Beck: the cartoon image of a stack-heeled Elton stepping from a down-at-heel city onto a yellow brick road winding towards a sun that was either rising or setting depending on your mood.

The *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* US tour was conducted from the same private Boeing 720B that Led Zeppelin had toured in that summer, the now infamous *Starship*. It had the words 'ELTON JOHN BAND TOUR' now emblazoned down one side of its red, white and blue fuselage, and came fitted with luxury leather lounge seats, proper



Signing copies of his album *Don't Shoot Me I'm Only The Piano Player*, January 1973.



Road Works

Goodbye Yellow Brick Road is the second-biggest-selling album released in 1973, now with more than 32 million sales worldwide. (The biggest-selling is Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side Of The Moon* with over 50 million.)

It also includes *Candle In The Wind*, the song that would go on to become the biggest-selling single of all-time. It was a No.11 hit in the UK in 1973. A 1987 live version recorded in Australia went platinum in America and stayed in the US chart for nearly two years and received a Grammy nomination for Best Male Pop Vocal Performance.

It reached No.5 in the UK.

Re-recorded in 1997 to mark the death of Princess Diana, with Bernie Taupin supplying new lyrics, famously changing opening line 'Goodbye, Norma Jean' to 'Goodbye, England's rose', along with four new stanzas, it was retitled *Candle In The Wind 1997*. Elton sung it at Diana's funeral to a TV audience of 2.5 billion people.

It instantly went to No.1, selling 658,000 copies on its first day of release in the UK. In America it sold over 3.5 million copies and was No.1 for 14 weeks. It sold more than 33 million copies worldwide, it became the biggest-selling single of all time.

The other momentous tracks on the album include *Bennie And The Jets*, which has subsequently featured in several Hollywood movies and TV shows, most memorably when Elton performed it live on *The Muppet Show* in 1978, accompanied by Kermit the Frog.

In 1994, when Axl Rose inducted Elton into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, he said of the track: "When I first heard *Bennie And The Jets*, I knew at that time that I had to be a performer."

As for the transcendent title track, Elton also performed that with Kermit. Its true pride of place in the Elton canon was confirmed on the Farewell Yellow Brick Road tour, which began every night with *Bennie And The Jets* and ended with *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*.

"There was no solitude, no reflection. I was still the little boy from Pinner Hill Road underneath."

Elton John

dinner tables, a pseudo-electric coal fire, a fully stocked bar and TV lounge and – très chic, dear – a new-fangled video player. On board was also an electric Thomas organ, which Elton studiously ignored, and, in a rear cabin, a king-sized double bed covered in shaggy white fur which nobody slept in but many guests enjoyed. Unless Elton was having one of his tantrums. Then he would disappear in there for however long it took for him to calm down again.

In a group photograph taken standing in front of his new floating palace, a wonderfully camp Elton is seen in a white-and-turquoise jumpsuit, a wide-brimmed Panama hat cheerfully atop his head, wielding a soul-brother ebony cane. Surrounded by a vast entourage of tour technicians, record label bigwigs, assistants, gofers, the four-man Muscle Shoals horn section, manager and lover John Reid, plus the band and singer Kiki Dee, recently signed to Elton's label Rocket, who Davey was "having a scene with".

Exactly three years on from his breakthrough shows at the tiny Troubadour club in LA, Elton now headlined the Hollywood Bowl and the Long Beach Arena on consecutive nights. Two weeks after that he headlined New York's Madison Square Garden for the first time. If *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*, in all its versions – single-album-allegory-hymn – is about transcending humdrum reality, then the American tour, which ran until October, found Elton's life transformed entirely into fantasy.

It was the same for Bernie, who toured with Elton. He didn't need to, he wanted to. Bernie had been deeply in love with America since he was a child gaping at *The Lone Ranger* on TV. Most of his songs were about, or set in, or have characters from, or cultural references, dreamscapes and an almost cinematic sense of the real – in America. That America now loved him too was so far over the rainbow for Bernie that he would have trouble coming back.

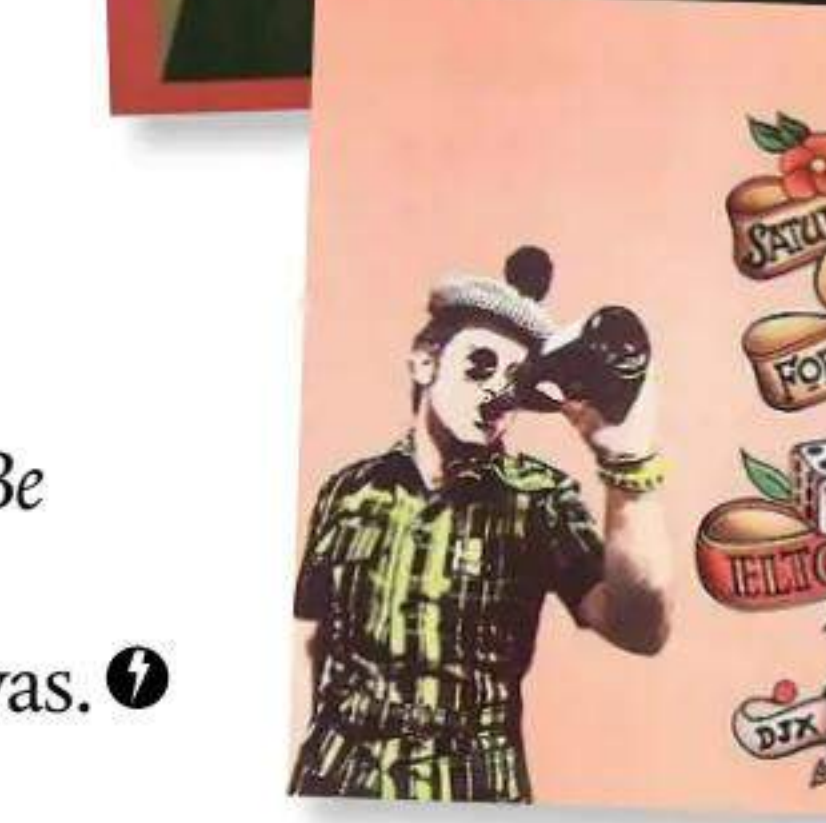
It was the same for the band and everyone else rocking in the clouds on the Starship. But while everyone else had a way to turn the volume down a notch if they wanted to – the band idled in peace; Bernie walked unmolested – Elton couldn't escape any of it for a second. He sang, he wrote, he performed, he did all the press, all the TV and radio, all the business meetings. His was the face everyone knew. Now it had become a human shield for everybody's bad behaviour but his own.

"We weren't angels, but we didn't get dragged into the spotlight because Elton took the heat for all that," Davey Johnstone told me frankly. "We did a lot of music together and had a lot of fun together too. A lot of fun."

He chuckled. "I've got to tell you. I can't say that it was terrible. Waking up with a hangover after being up for two days was a nightmare. But we were young enough to be able to wake up and go: 'I'm going to sleep for the next day so I'm okay for what's coming up.' But those were crazy times. I wouldn't change it for the world."

In December 1973, Elton finished a 13-date UK tour on a triumphant note with three sold-out shows at London's Hammersmith Odeon. It coincided nicely with his surprise novelty single *Step Into Christmas* sharing the Top 10 that week with other soon-to-be-perennial cool-Yule classics like Slade's *Merry Xmas Everybody* and Wizzard's *I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday*.

For Elton John, for now, it felt like it was. ❶



THE
★CLASSIC★
Rock
INTERVIEW

ANN & NANCY
WILSON WILSON

THE HEART

The Heart mainstays' long and eventful career has taken the two sisters collectively and individually to thin-air highs and crushing lows, in a 50-year roller-coaster rock'n'roll saga. Along the way they've made some wonderful music. And their journey continues...

Interview: **Paul Rees**

Fittingly for two self-possessed opposites, Ann and Nancy Wilson have settled about as far away from each other as is possible within the United States land mass: Ann on a fingertip of the eastern seaboard, Nancy nearly 3,000 miles to the west as the crow flies. This week in early spring, both are at their respective homes. Ann in Florida, Nancy in the verdant wine country of northern California. Ann, reading glasses perched on her nose, throaty laugh, dressed in black. Nancy, pink streaks in her hair, her black-and-white collie dog skittering about the kitchen, is more of a chatterbox than her elder sibling, just as quick to laugh. Both are good, easy-going interviewees.

They're preparing to once more ramp up Heart, the band they've piloted for 50 years. And what a journey it's been. Heady heights, plunging lows. So many indelible songs, such personal drama. Altogether, a rock'n'roll saga of epic proportions. Days from now they'll be standing on the roof of a downtown Manhattan edifice, the

Rockefeller Center, blazing through Bonnie Tyler's *Total Eclipse Of The Heart* for an edition of *The Tonight Show* going out on the night of an actual eclipse. Then there's the small matter of a world tour planned to stretch for 18 months. It could be their valedictory lap, given that Ann will be 74 this June and Nancy turned 70 in March.

Ann was born in San Diego, Nancy in San Francisco. Their father, John Wilson, was a major in the US marines corps, mother Lois ran the household. The couple had a third daughter, Lynne, four years Ann's senior. The family moved around with John Wilson's postings, stations in Panama and Taiwan included. When he left the service, disillusioned with the war in Vietnam, they settled in a suburb of Seattle, Bellevue, where the sisters passed through the same school, Sammamish High. Ann graduated in 1968 and went off to art college with aspirations of becoming a fashion designer. Nancy left in 1972 and went to Portland State University to major in literature and creative writing. ➤



NANCY: © RICHARD STEEL IMAGES; INSET: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY





Heart at Oakland Coliseum, California in 1977 : (l-r) Roger Fisher, Nancy Wilson, Ann Wilson, Howard Leese.

Heart circa 1977: (clockwise from left) Roger Fisher, Howard Leese, Steve Fossen, Michael Derosier, Nancy Wilson, Ann Wilson.

“Ann had the voice of doom. I was really consumed with being her accompanist.”

Nancy Wilson

Throughout, the two made music together: Ann the singer, Nancy accompanying on acoustic guitar, piano and vocal harmonies. With two friends they had a four-part harmony group, The Viewpoints. While at university, Nancy performed solo acoustic sets in coffee shops and cafes. Ann joined a rock band, Hocus Pocus, alongside guitarist Roger Fisher and bassist Steve Fossen. Fisher had an elder brother, Mike, who was evading the Vietnam draft up in Vancouver, Canada.

One night, Mike Fisher snuck over the border to see Hocus Pocus play a bar called the Iron Bull in the frontier town of Bellingham. He was bowled over by Ann Wilson, and she with him – love at first sight. She followed him back to Vancouver. Subsequently, Roger Fisher, Fossen and latterly Nancy beat the same path, and by the beginning of 1974 Heart were born. By then Nancy was also in a relationship with Roger Fisher. The two sisters and the two brothers intertwined in perfect harmony. For a while, anyway.

Who were your parents to you when you were growing up?

Nancy Wilson: We came from so much military influence. Dad was in the marines corps. His brother too. Grandpa Wilson retired from the corps as a four-star general. My other grandpa was in the army. It was a real surprise when dad retired because of Vietnam. He didn’t believe there was any nobility to that war. A “dirty war”, he called it. We’d moved around so much as a family, we were tight-knit and in our own little bubble.

Ann Wilson: Mum stayed at home with us kids, took care of us, and the finances and all that kind of stuff. Our parents were liberal. Except for the fact we travelled to a different place to live every eighteen months or so it was a pretty normal childhood. There were hard things about it. I was never a popular kid. I wasn’t like a cute blonde girl. I was really sort of an outcast. More apt to be in the folk music society than be a cheerleader.



What is your recollection of first hearing music?

Ann: Being in the car with my dad, on the way to the hospital to see new-born Nancy. *Sixteen Tons* by Jimmy Dean came on the radio. I’ll never forget hearing that song.

Nancy: I can remember looking through the bars of my crib and my mum singing a lullaby to me, *Curly Headed Baby*. Her voice had a round, smoky quality, kind of like Patti Page. We always had a stereo system with good speakers in the house, and a collection of vinyl. Records would always be spinning, everything from classical to Broadway musicals. James Brown and Aretha Franklin. Barbra Streisand and Ray Charles. Ann and I would do interpretive dances to scenes from *West Side Story* in the living room, jumping off the back of the couch.

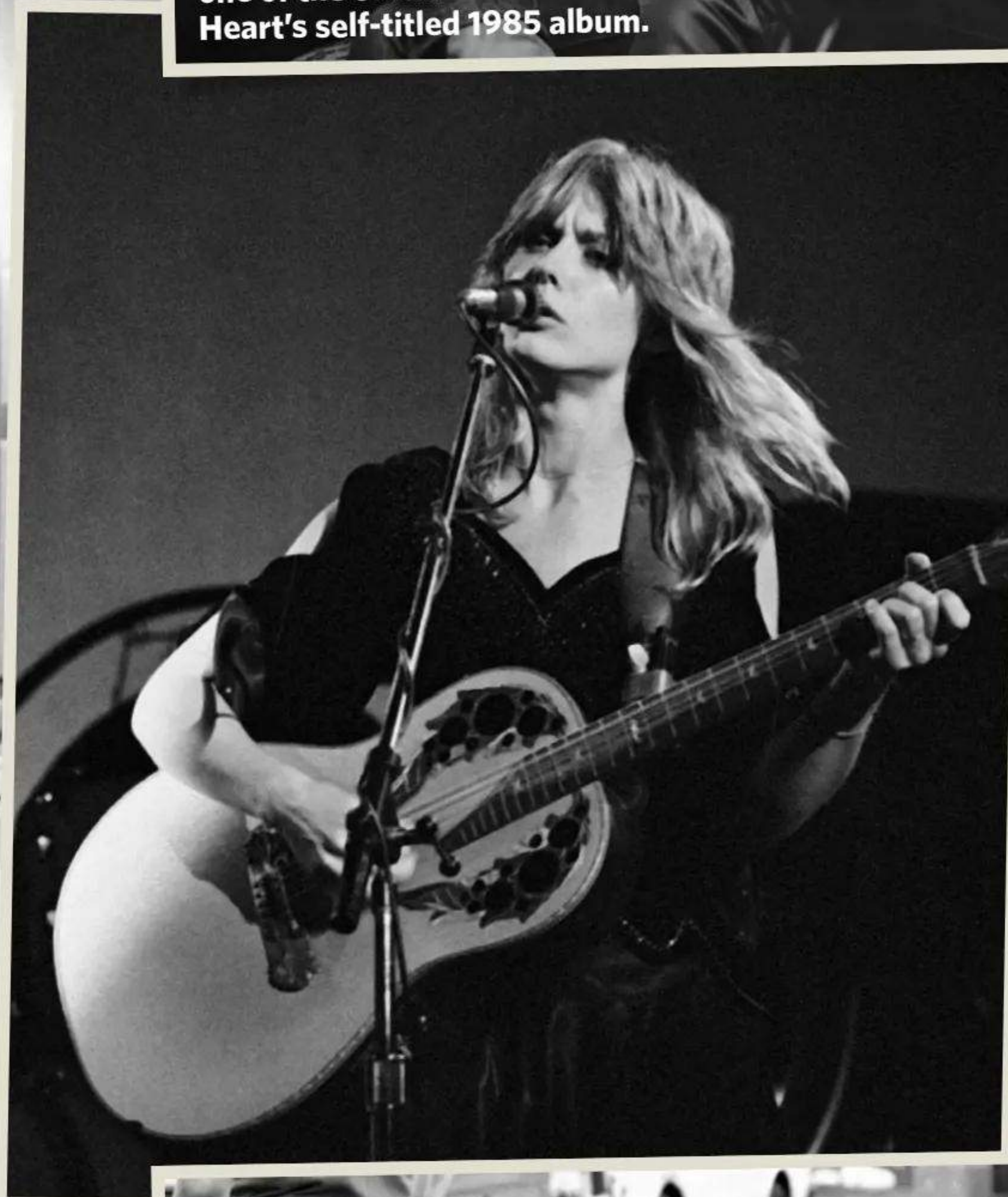
Who or what inspired you to start making music?

Ann: It wasn’t until high school I realised I could sing and carry a tune. I didn’t ever sing solo until much later. Our father especially was really behind us when we got started with music. Mother was a little more sceptical. Two out of three daughters





Nancy and Ann with Elton John's lyricist Bernie Taupin, who was one of the outside writers for Heart's self-titled 1985 album.



going into the entertainment business wasn't exactly her idea of a safe pastime for young girls. She just wanted us to be happy, basically. Time and again she said to us: "I'm not going to tell you what to do or be necessarily, but be blissful and do what you really love." We did.

Nancy: Our parents saw how consumed we were, so they were very encouraging. It was the neighbours, the Joneses, that said: "Don't let Nancy play guitar, it'll ruin her fingernails." Well, they were right, but I didn't really care about fingernails. Our parents cheered us on. They helped us make payments on cheap guitars. Ann had the voice of doom. I was really consumed with being her accompanist. There really weren't any women to inspire me. I was inspired by Jimmy Page, Stephen Stills, Neil Young, Paul McCartney and John Lennon, Elton John's piano playing. They were my muses.

Ann: They were all men back then. There were a few female singers I really loved, like Judy Garland, but in those days there wasn't yet a female rock'n'roll icon. My inspirations were Robert Plant, Lennon and McCartney, Rod Stewart, Elton John, Harry Belafonte.

When did you begin performing in earnest?

Ann: I answered a newspaper ad and auditioned for these guys Roger Fisher and Steve Fossen. We drank coffee all afternoon and jammed, and they hired me. I was really lucky because I wasn't perfected as a singer at all. I was just somebody who loved to sing. I was going to Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle. I found out really quickly, in the first year, I wasn't meant to be a fine-artist. I was

splitting my time between the band and school, and I'd be up all hours of the night playing with the band and then having to make an eight a.m. class. I couldn't do it. I had to choose one, so I chose the band.

Nancy: I'd walk to the Pepper Grinder bar with my acoustic guitar, a block down from the Pacific University campus in the tiny town of Forest Grove, Oregon. They had a PA and a mic. I played *Locomotive Breath* by Jethro Tull and stuff that was on the radio at the time. I once got twenty dollars for playing *Stairway To Heaven* all by myself. I had to buy my albums somehow, right? I tried to slip in a few original things too. I was working on music of my own. *Soul Of The Sea* was one of the songs I was writing at the time that ended up on the first Heart album. I was always trying to write with Ann long-distance. We'd have phone calls, and make cassette tapes to mail each other.

Eventually you joined up with each other again in Vancouver.

Ann: I went up there in 1971. I was following my heart. I fell in love. Michael had a little cottage in the woods, overlooking a creek. That was where we settled. We lived there for a good six months before the rest of the band followed me and wrecked our solitude. I wasn't pleased about it. Not at first. It wasn't my idea. I wanted the romance of just being with him in this little round house to go on for ever. Then in early 1974 Nancy joined us. She'd been coming up and sitting in with us before



Ann and Nancy with Robert Plant backstage at Milton Keynes Bowl, June 1982.

then, but she was serious about being in college. She was an intellectual in that regard.

Nancy: I dropped out of college. My parents were trying to pay for it, but it was really hard for them. We learned how to play on a big stage at a Vancouver club called Oil Can Harry's. A lot happened really quickly.

Ann: I'd been in bands without Nancy for a long time, so it was just different. Nancy's a great harmony singer, and acoustic guitar player. She added to Heart what I felt it was missing – an acoustic heart. That was something Zeppelin had, and I always really valued. It made Heart vastly more interesting for me.

Was Heart effectively the Wilson sisters' band all along?

Ann: No. I have to take issue with the fact it's ➤



Ann Wilson in 1978 and
(right) Nancy in '83.



records went platinum. *Little Queen*, produced once again by Mike Flicker, delivered another signature track, the piledriving *Barracuda*, Ann's response to a salacious record company minion asking after her lover and meaning Nancy. The following year's *Dog And Butterfly* raced to two million sales in the US. Its centrepiece, the Zep-heavy anthem *Mistral Wind*, is both sisters' favourite Heart song.

Nothing could go wrong for Heart, it seemed. Until it did. Touring *Dog And Butterfly*, Roger Fisher's infidelities ended his and Nancy's relationship. Ann and Mike Fisher broke up at the same time. Further muddying the waters, Nancy took up with Michael Derosier. The band limped through to the end of the tour, after which the Wilsons fired the Fishers.

“The big hair and the wild clothes. It was theatre... I loved it.”

Ann Wilson

me and Nancy's band at all. The people that are in Heart are always treated on an equal footing. We don't hire back-up musicians and throw them some cash.

Nancy: Ann and I have always been the left and right hand of the same musical being. We couldn't be more different as people. She's like our dad, and I'm more like our mum. She's way more of a soldier, a warrior. We've always been like the eye of the hurricane with Heart. We've always been able to figure out how to communicate our roles as the two main leaders. Both of us together own it fifty-fifty, so we can't out-vote each other.

With Mike Fisher acting as their de-facto manager, the fledgling Heart hooked up with producer Mike Flicker, transplanted to Vancouver from LA. They began recording demos for their debut album at local indie label Mushroom Records' Can-Base Studios. Flicker, who had initially been more interested in nurturing a solo Ann Wilson, also brought two of his favoured session musicians into the line-up: keyboard player/guitarist Howard Leese and drummer Michael Derosier. At the basest level, the completed album, *Dreamboat Annie*, sounded like Zeppelin in touch with their

feminine side. Powerful and whimsical by turns on two standout Wilson sisters' songs, *Magic Man*, Ann's hymn to Mike Fisher, and *Crazy On You*.

Released through Mushroom in September 1975, the album got off to a slow start, inching to 30,000 sales in Canada. A slot opening an arena show for Rod Stewart in Montreal and radio airplay over the border in the US gave it wings, and by the following year *Dreamboat Annie* had gone platinum. Without consulting his charges, Mushroom boss Shelly Siegel promoted it with an infamous full-page ad in *Rolling Stone* magazine: the album's cover artwork, the Wilsons photographed back-to-back and bare shouldered, beneath the suggestive headline: 'It Was Only Our First Time'. It was enough, along with a lack of tour support, to prompt Heart to flee to major label CBS's new Portrait imprint.

Siegel hit back in April 1977, releasing the unfinished second album Heart had been recording for him as *Magazine*, a month ahead of their official debut for Portrait, *Little Queen*. Both



What stands out for you now about the making of *Dreamboat Annie*?

Ann: I knew absolutely nothing about singing in the studio on a big mic. It was going from zero to ten. Mike Flicker was my mentor. He taught me everything I know in those early recording sessions. Making a record is nerve-racking. You're under the microscope as a singer. I thought I sounded high and shrill.

Nancy: It was so intimidating to go into an actual studio. To me it seemed

huge. Years later we revisited Can-Base for a radio broadcast, and it was tiny. We were so doggedly determined to be good. I think we actually pulled it off.

How challenging was it to assert yourselves as artists and be two women in a rock band at that point in time?

Ann: It was 1975. Women were thought of as sex objects, that's all. Mushroom Records decided they were going to capitalise. Two chicks and two sisters – wow! Think of the possibilities for titillation. All of that made us really angry. When we saw ourselves being treated in such a sleazy, cheesy way we totally rebelled.

Nancy: There's a little more guardrail now for the



Heart in 1985, the MTV years: (l-r) Nancy, Mark Andes, Ann, Howard Leese, Denny Carmassi.



chauvinism that was so rampant at the time. I think we took it with a ton of salt – like, over the shoulder. Boys will be boys, men will be slimeballs. If you’re a pretty girl, you have to endure it. But you’re really there to do the work and prove to everybody that you’re good. Being good had everything to do with it.

When a band lifts off, what’s it like being at the centre of it?

Ann: Very exciting. It seems like the good news keeps on pouring in. Pretty soon you’ve got money pouring in too, and everybody’s buying sports cars and fur coats – at least in those days – and houses and gifts for their parents. In the early days, Michael and I bought a house and a Jaguar XKE. Those were our big ‘beautiful people’ expenses.

You must have had a particular nagging doubt, though – two sisters dating two brothers in and around the same band. It was bound to go wrong, wasn’t it?

Ann: Oh yes, there was constant doubt. Whenever you’re in a relationship with someone, the green-eyed monster is always right around the corner. You’re watching to make sure he’s not looking at anybody else. Being jumpy about it. They jokingly called the four of us the Wilshers. It worked for a good while. It was family. But the typical things started to eat away at the perfection of it all. People find fidelity extremely difficult. That was the undoing of the Wilsher tribe.

Nancy: In my mind it was more of a professional arrangement than a real relationship. It was easier to have someone to bunk with in a hotel than pay for an extra room. There was

a communication line between the two brothers and two sisters. Those guys had started the band, and I was new to it, and Roger had a crush on me. I kind of went along with it for a while there. But still, bad idea.

Ann: We didn’t have the stamina that, say, Fleetwood Mac had. It was extremely hard for us to work together as musicians. The emotional toll it all

took. At that point we just needed a breather. Everything was so huge. The money, the fame, interviews. It kind of ate us.

Hheart plateaued with 1980’s *Bebe Le Strange*, their first post-Fishers album and their last with Mike Flicker. Then they hit the skids. Flicker’s intended replacement as producer, Jimmy Iovine, fresh from working on a run of stellar albums for Tom Petty, Stevie Nicks and Dire Straits, bailed from Heart’s 1982 album *Private Audition*, citing a lack of hit songs. The album sold much less than its predecessors, but better than 1983’s unloved follow-up *Passionworks*.

In the interim between those two records, Fossen and Derosier were given their marching orders, and Mark Andes (Spirit, Firefall) and Denny Carmassi (Montrose, Gamma) respectively filled their slots.

After *Passionworks*, Heart left Portrait for Capitol Records. Their new label teamed them with a new producer, Ron Nevison. Outside writers such as Jim Vallance (*What About Love*),

Holly Knight (*Never*) and Elton John’s lyricist Bernie Taupin (*These Dreams*) were brought in, and the band’s image was revamped to fit the big-haired/leather-and-lace-clad template of the era. At a stroke, Heart were resurrected. Their self-titled comeback

album of 1985 went to No.1 in the US, and sold more than five million copies. The accompanying videos – Ann shot in soft focus, Nancy recast as a sex kitten – were hardly any more subtle than Mushroom’s playbook had been, but got saturation coverage on the booming MTV. *Bad Animals* (1987), which included the No.1 uber-power ballad *Alone*, and 1990’s *Brigade*, maintained the band’s upward curve.

“I was kind of the Farrah Fawcett of rock for a minute there.”

Nancy Wilson

How personally did you deal with the slump?

Ann: I partied. I bought a house in Seattle, for me and my friends, and went home. We lived a high life for a couple of years. It was a *lot of fun*. But it was not necessarily that successful creatively.

Nancy: When we got to *Passionworks*, we worked with a producer [Keith Olsen] who was hitting bottom on his cocaine habit. Everything was really

hard and difficult. We were trying not to get sucked into the cocaine of it all.

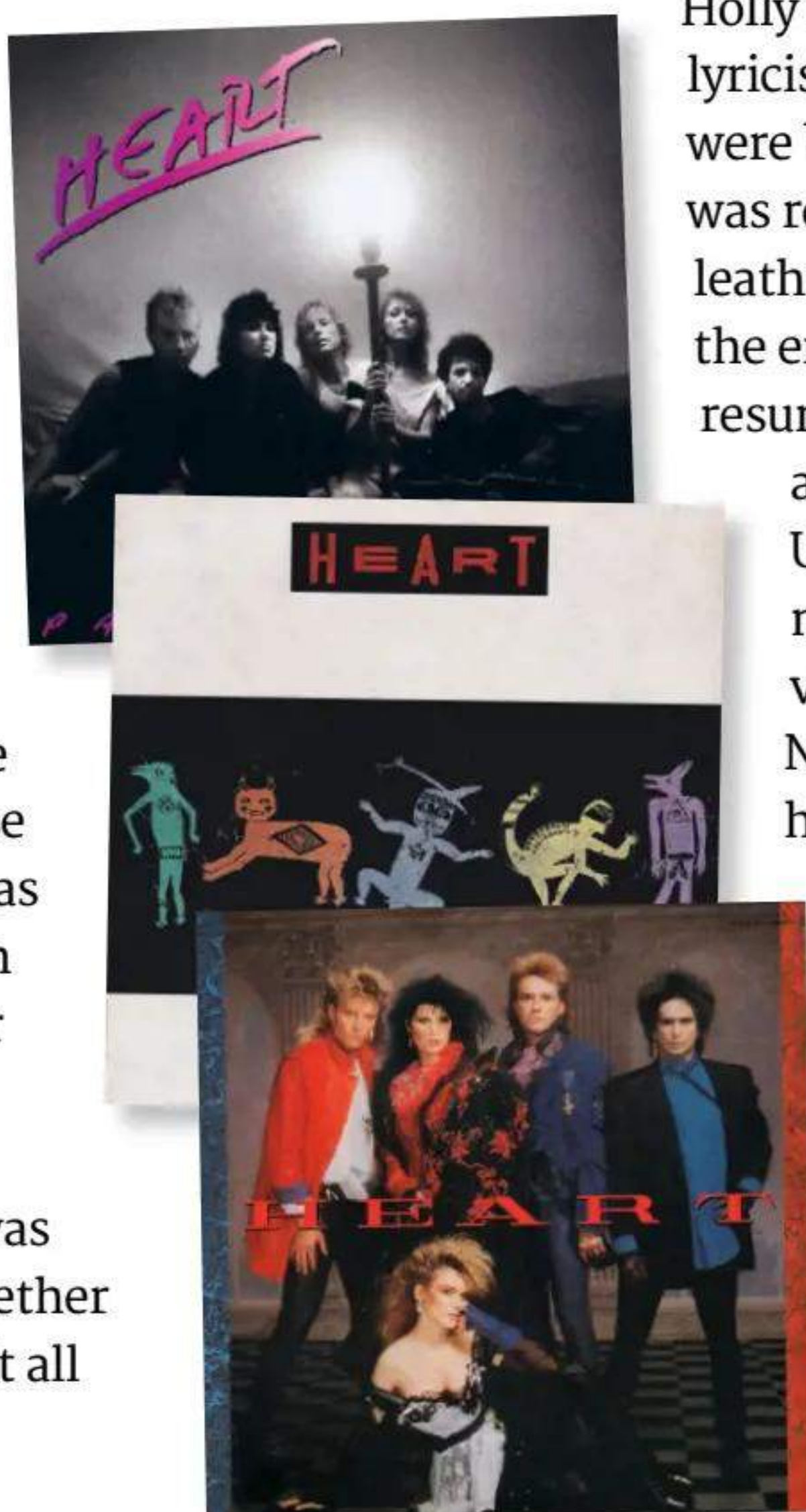
The album came out, nothing happened. It was nowhere to be found. That was really hurtful. Me and Ann and our bestie Sue Ennis, who we

always wrote with, got together to have a movie night. We watched *Terms Of Endearment*, then Spielberg’s *The Color Purple*, and *Steel Magnolias*. It was a three-pronged cry-fest. We got out a big box of Kleenex and sat around Ann’s library crying for six hours. It actually felt better after we did it. We had some wine and a nice night afterwards.

Ann: In 1983 we met this guy, Don Grierson, who was the head of A&R at Capitol. He believed that with the right songs Heart could be reanimated and brought back. He said to us: “If you give me the opportunity to go fishing for some songs for you, and you write songs too, I bet you we could have a hit record.” And he was right.

How willing were you to be made over?

Nancy: We were a little desperate after the big turkey of *Passionworks*. We had to do something. It was a new era. The fashion was changing. MTV was pushing the agenda on rock bands to have big hair and ‘the look’. The mind-expansion of the sixties and seventies was turning into the ego-expanded, cocaine-driven 1980s. We were not sophisticated. We were not LA people. It was not a fit, but we did okay. We got through it. I always had a joke with myself that I’d know I’d made it when I heard a Heart song in an elevator. And it ➤





Heart: still beating strong in 2024.

happened; I heard *These Dreams* in the grocery store. You feel worthy. Like you've worked really hard to do something that connected to people.

Ann: The first, self-titled album was fun. The big hair and the wild clothes. It was theatre. Having wanted myself to be a fashion designer, to have stylists heaping clothes on me was great. I loved it. By *Bad Animals* [1987] we were getting tired of it because we were touring so extensively. When you try taking these incredible costumes out into the sweaty country, where it's a hundred degrees, and you're dancing around in stiletto heels... So by *Brigade* [1990] we were over it.

Marty Callner, director of your *Never* promo, once claimed: "Everybody told me how much they loved Nancy's tits in that video." How did you square being so objectified on MTV?

Nancy: Yeah, I was kind of the Farrah Fawcett of rock for a minute there. I didn't feel like that was who I am. I'm a musician first, and I've got more to offer than some saucy-looking image of me. But I figured, okay, this is survival, and I'll be a poster girl for this if I get to go out and play my guitar. It got a little out of hand a couple of times, but who cares? I was indelibly emblazoned in the minds of many men, so I'm glad for that. I can't complain.

Ann: *Everybody* in those MTV years was objectified to death. You were expected to look like a model and be a dancer and an actor and sing. Wow. To be a quadruple threat when you're just a person from Seattle who played in bar bands. It was really hard. I thought *These Dreams* was a remarkable song. I think *Alone* also was pretty stunning. But there was something at the very soul of the music

we were doing that really wasn't much like Heart. It wasn't our words we were singing, it was somebody else's.

The music business of the 80s is typically perceived as being brash, excessive and OTT. Was it that in your experience?

Ann: Oh, it was definitely excessive. Everything it's made out to be, it was. There was never enough of anything, including money. It was a very materialistic time. The dignity of women was at a low ebb. But I totally enjoyed being up on the big stages and flying around in private planes, and being entertained in these lavish ways.

On the other side of the 80s, the Wilsons returned to earth. They formed an acoustic covers band, The Lovemongers, and made a partial return to Heart's roots for 1993's *Desire Walks On*. In 1995, Nancy broke off to start a family

with her husband, film director Cameron Crowe. The couple had twin boys, Curtis and Billy, in 2000. Nancy wrote scores for Crowe's films *Almost Famous* in 2000 and 2001's *Vanilla Sky*. The couple divorced in 2010. Nancy married TV music producer Geoff Bywater in 2012. Ann made a covers album, *Hope And Glory*, in 2007, got sober in 2009, and married Dean Wetter in 2015.

Ever since, with Heart they've taken a scenic route, not without its bumps in the road and pitfalls. There have been four well-regarded albums, from 2004's *Jupiter's Darling* to 2016's *Beautiful Broken* (that had James Hetfield duetting on the title track), each harking back to the electric-acoustic foundations of their 70s records.

In 2013 the original line-up was inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame by Chris Cornell. Their performance at the ceremony was the first time in 34 years that the Wilsons had shared a stage with Roger Fisher, Fossen, Leese and Derosier. The sisters had made a bigger impression in December 2012, when, with Jason Bonham on drums, they delivered an overwhelming reading of *Stairway To Heaven* at Led Zeppelin's Kennedy Center Honors bash, attended by Jimmy Page, John Paul Jones, Robert Plant and US president Barack Obama.

There have been other, tumultuous passages. On August 27, 2016, Dean Wetter was arrested and plead guilty to assaulting Nancy's teenage sons. Wetter's ire was raised by the boys neglecting to lock up his RV after a Heart show. Unsurprisingly, the sisters were estranged for two years afterwards. They reunited under the Heart banner to tour in 2019. Apart for four more years, Ann fronted her own band, Tripsitter, and Nancy went out with Nancy Wilson's Heart, in which Ann's parts were sung by Kimberly Nichole, a finalist on *The Voice*. This latest revival was heralded with a show in Seattle on New Year's Eve 2023, with Tripsitter serving as the Wilsons' backing band. Three weeks on from it, they announced Heart's Royal Flush tour.

How did you navigate yourself out of the 80s?

Nancy: I left the band to try to start a family, and it took a couple of years longer than I wanted it to. My kids were two at the time I rejoined the band. I took them out on tour with me. We had diaper pails in the bus and a nanny along. Every zoo in every large city we played, they went to.

Ann: You mean not falling victim to the emotional carnage? Well, I have a natural ability. These little red flags wave in my brain when I get to a certain point. Like with anxiety, or depression. At a point in the 90s, I realised that I needed something, so I started studying meditation. I learned basic meditation techniques. I can do myself tremendous good by knowing how to stop and be still and be mindful. It's really saved me a lot of times.

How have you maintained your relationship as sisters?

Nancy: There's been some challenges, but not hardly around *that*. It's been everything else around us. The politics and the family drama that ensues around the peaceful core. You have to expect that. It's like the movie



Ann and Nancy on US TV's *The Late Show With David Letterman* in 2014 (with the Foo Fighters).



Seattle be the day: Heart's Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame Induction Ceremony in 2013: (l-r) Mike McCready, Chris Cornell, Debbie Shair, Nancy Wilson, Ann Wilson and Jerry Cantrell.

Twister. You're caught up in the tornado, and you see the cow fly by, and there goes the tractor. This is my favourite new analogy. You've got to hold on tight to something that's not going to get sucked into the stratosphere. Ann and I know how to hold to the centre. That's what we do.

Ann: With a sibling, you can get into the habit of assuming you know everything that's going on in their head. That they're not even a person in their own right. You kind of own them in a way. And then they will come out with something so completely opposite to that. That's when you realise: "Nope, this person is their own person. They don't belong to me." That's a beautiful thing, though. The distance between people must be maintained. Siblings especially fall out. They really do. Because, I think, they know their relationship is elastic. It can bounce back. There's always a way back home.

Nancy: I like to say Ann is a lot of nice people. She's a double Gemini. There's a lot of different Ann Wilsons, right? Catch the right one, and that's the one you want to be with.

When is your sister at her best?

Ann: When she's playing acoustic guitar. That's always my vote. She can make a guitar move, and come up with parts that are so cool, and so her. That's when she's at her most real. She's not thinking about herself.

Nancy: Ann's just an ingenious, funny, hysterical, driven person. She's complex. I know her sometimes better than she knows herself. So she's lucky to have me, and I'm lucky to have her. We're symbiotic siblings and somehow it works. I'm not ever sure how, to be quite honest.

Personally, when have you been happiest?

Ann: The second time I fell in love, with the man who's now my husband. I think people were laughing at me behind their hands because I was just a bubble. I was so happy and light-hearted and idealistic. Suddenly I didn't wear black clothes any more. I was in all these colours. Pretty cute, I think.

Nancy: Falling in love makes me happiest. I went to the ocean for my seventieth birthday. It was to

alone and stay in the house and watch movies. I pulled out of it. I have some really good friends.

What's your biggest fault, or worst habit?

Ann: Trusting people too much. I trust everybody to be real and honest. I don't feel paranoid about people. I've been told that's a real fault. I mean, you have to be careful with people. I do think of myself as a strong person. Up to a point, and then I'll go: "Okay, no more."

I will back away. I won't ever lash out, I'll just withdraw.

Nancy: It used to be a lot of worse things than I do these days. I used to drink too much. I used to smoke. I used to do drugs here and there. Today my worst habit would be laziness. I don't get off my butt enough to do the strengthening it's going to take to get through this

next year and a half.

It's the opening night of the tour. You're on stage. The lights go down. What are you thinking in that moment?

Nancy: It's like the feeling of being on a roller-coaster, and going 'chink-a-chink-chink' up to the top of the track. And the moment the lights go down, that's when you're at the top. The next thing you know you're hurtling through space. I've been there before, but I never feel casual or cavalier about it, ever. It's more like: "Oh shit, here we go!"

Ann: That's when everything's okay. That's when the nerves go away. Maybe five seconds into the first song, everything's going to be fine; I mean, knock on wood. That's when you're an astronaut inside the nose cone. You're about to take off. There's nothing you can do about it. So you have to just relax, strap in and enjoy it. 🎧

For the latest information visit heart-music.com

"I like to say Ann is a lot of nice people. Catch the right one and that's the one you want to be with."

Nancy Wilson

the same cabin Ann used to have and where we wrote a million songs. Stone Gossard of Pearl Jam has it now. It overlooks the Pacific, all the way north and south. It was a glorious sunny weekend. Sue Ennis was there. Geoff was there, my soulmate and best friend. Music was all around and there was lots of chocolate involved. It was super-happy. I'll live on that one for a while.

And at your lowest?

Nancy: Lowest is loss. Losing a mum. Losing a marriage. But, you know, you find yourself dealing with that in a creative way a lot of the time. Even the greatest of sadness translates into something creative for me because that's my armour.

Ann: Maybe in the nineties when I was recovering from the eighties. I wanted to be



How



The West Was Won

It was on **Thin Lizzy's** third album, *Vagabonds Of The Western World*, that "you really get to hear Phil the poet", says drummer Brian Downey. After that record, the boys really were in town.

Words: **James McNair** Illustration: **Adam Forster**



Long after they had gone their separate ways, original Thin Lizzy guitarist Eric Bell encountered Phil Lynott shopping. "I was walking past a 7-Eleven in London", Bell says today. "I could see this slim, tall guy with an Afro – but surely not, you know? I walk in and there's Phillip holding a wire basket with some Domestos in it. I'm thinking: 'Fuck, if your fans could see you now...' He's like: 'Ah, Jesus! How are ya, Eric?' We have the big hug, and Phil looks at me and says: 'You know something? We created a monster. Every gig I play, somebody still shouts for *Whiskey In The fucking Jar!*'"

Lizzy's fine reinvention of an ancient Irish folk song proved to be a double-edged sword for them. A stand-alone single in November 1972, *Whiskey* was the group's breakthrough UK No.6 hit, but it also prompted a directional quandary. Lizzy's management wanted another folk remake as the follow-up – "It was: 'You're in the door, don't blow it'", Bell recalls – but Lizzy weren't keen.

Their upcoming third album, *Vagabonds Of The Western World* was a transitional, forward-looking record which showcased their versatility and vocalist, bassist and main writer Lynott's burgeoning gift for sometimes poetic, sometimes macho songwriting. More folk covers would be a bad move. It would typecast them.

Vagabonds was released in September 1973. Lynott insisted on *Randolph's Tango* as *Whiskey's* follow-up single, but it sank without trace. "It was great, but it was a bossa-nova," says Bell. "We were skint and travelling up and down the country playing gigs, and every time we stopped at services Phil would buy all the music

magazines and scan them for a mention of our new single. Weeks passed, and Phil kept looking. Still nothing on *Randolph's Tango*. He eventually realised that we'd blown it, and that affected him pretty deeply."

The original Lizzy trio of Lynott, Bell and drummer Brian Downey would implode before the year was out. But that was no reflection on *Vagabonds Of The Western World*, the recent 50th-Anniversary reissue of which has prompted *Classic Rock's* chats with Bell, Downey and the painter of the LP's ace sleeve-art, Jim Fitzpatrick. Although *Vagabonds* has perplexed some fans of 'classic'-era Lizzy LPs such as *Jailbreak* and *Live And Dangerous*, it presents an equally captivating, if very different, Thin Lizzy. *Vagabonds* is ripe for critical rehabilitation, then, but to tell its story we must journey back to Ireland...

|||||
"There was a time
when I thought:
'Did I really play
in Thin Lizzy?'"

Eric Bell

"I've lived here in Clontarf for twenty years now," says Brian Downey, chatting at the North tip of Dublin Bay. "I still pass the house that Phil and Eric rented here almost every day,

and I often think about the wild parties we had." Lizzy's drummer is referring to the Castle Avenue mansion Lynott and Bell shared with their girlfriends – and pretty much anyone else who wanted to hang out. Downey was still living with his parents then, but he too was at Castle Avenue the night Gary Moore celebrated his eighteenth birthday there.

"Yeah, a guy called Larry Mooney got the plastic bin out of the kitchen, cleaned it out, and mixed up a punch from every alcoholic drink known to man," Bell recalls, picking up the story. "Me and Gary were on our hands and knees, barking like dogs."

Bell knew Moore from their shared musical apprenticeship in Belfast. At 17, Bell had >



played with Van Morrison in Them before paying his dues with Irish show band The Dreams. The latter gig was a good earner which required him to play country, soul and the Top 20 hits of the day. But, seeking a band in which guitar enjoyed the centrality afforded his heroes Jeff Beck and Hank Marvin, Bell settled in Dublin in late 1969 and began scouting for fellow voyagers. Initially the great musicians he sought were nowhere to be found. Worse, his savings were dwindling. "It was: 'Jesus, what a mistake I've made leaving The Dreams!'" he recalls.

Lynott and Downey, friends from school in Dublin's Crumlin district, had already played in several bands together by the time Bell chanced upon the pair. He'd been out drinking with Them organist Eric Wrixon, and had just dropped his first acid tab when (mostly) covers act Orphanage, who included Lynott and Downey, took the stage at the Countdown Club and blew his mind.

"Phil was so skinny, tailor-made for stardom," Bell says. "Brian's drumming was so mature for his age and he got a great sound out of his kit."

The acid was kicking-in by now, bringing Bell's dreams into Technicolor: "I thought, 'Wow! These are the guys I want!'"

"Eric came up to us during our break," says Downey. "I don't know if it was the acid, but he was very keen, very insistent. We hadn't heard him play, but the fact that he'd been in Them with Van Morrison was a good marker. He said he'd pay for rehearsals. We were like, hang on, we've still got loads of gigs lined-up with Orphanage. Eric was like, fine – finish those and we'll start a new band."

With rehearsals and some early gigs under way, legend holds that it was Bell's playful mimicry of his bandmates' Southern accents that led the trio to co-opt/reboot the name of *The Dandy* comic's girl robot Tin Lizzie.

"We were quickly regarded as a bit of a supergroup in Ireland", says Downey. But, true as that was, frontman Lynott was still finding his way with four strings, hence his ongoing lessons with Brush Shiels, bassist with Irish blues band Skid Row.

Always networking, always broadening his skill set, Lynott was also exploring the more hippy-ish side of Dublin literary life.

"We used to have 'happenings'," recalls artist Jim Fitzpatrick. "Eamonn Carr [later of Horslips], Peter



Thin Lizzy, November 1973: (l-r) Brian Downey, Phil Lynott, Eric Bell. Inset: miming to hit single *Whiskey In The Jar* on *Top Of The Pops*, January 31, 1973.

Fallon and myself had been in this band called Tara Telephone, and people would get up and read their poetry at our gigs. That morphed into a series of arts magazines called *Capella*. Marc Bolan and [US Beat writer] Allen Ginsberg contributed, and John Lennon gave us a drawing.

"Anyway, Phillip's at a happening one night. He's read some of his poetry, we're sharing a joint, and he's intrigued by two artwork posters that are hanging on the wall. We both loved Marvel comics, and Phillip thought the posters were by an American, maybe [*Captain America* creator/illustrator] Jack Kirby or someone. But I'd painted them. They had Irish themes and Phil liked that."

Keyboard player Eric Wrixon was in Lizzy's earliest line-up too, but he left before their debut single *The Farmer* (which bombed) was released. Having scored a deal with Decca, the band released their self-titled debut LP in April 1971. But despite quality, Jimi Hendrix-like material such as *Ray-Gun* and *Look What The Wind Blew In Barber*, it too failed to set the heather alight.

"Phillip was an Irish Mick who wanted to be a poet, not a rock star."

Jim Fitzpatrick

Lizzy had a growing sense of stalemate in Ireland. They quickly realised that, if they were to progress, they'd need to be in the eye of the storm. So the whole Lizzy operation (band, girlfriends, roadies, gear) emigrated to humble, dingy digs in North London. "People in Dublin thought we'd made it and were living like kings", says Bell. "Little did they know."

The band recorded their second LP, *Shades Of A Blue Orphanage* at De Lane Lee studios in Wembley. Once again, the word 'orphanage' had currency for Lynott. His Guyanese father Cecil Parris had parted ways with his Irish mother Philomena before she knew she was pregnant, hence Philomena and her baby were stigmatised while living in a Birmingham 'home for unmarried mothers'. Although Philomena adored her son and was always in touch with him, it was his maternal grandmother who raised him in Dublin. He was eternally grateful, and wrote *Shades Of A Blue Orphanage* song *Sarah* for her.

Lynott's very personal songwriting was always intriguing, and his voice was already a wonderful instrument. "He was so soulful", agrees Downey. "His pitching was perfect, and he'd play with phrasing in a way that always sounded musical and natural."



Phillip in West Hampstead we had baked beans constantly," says Jim Fitzpatrick. "If we went out for a Chinese meal it was a really big deal."

Lynott and Fitzpatrick had bonded years earlier – and not just because of their shared love of Marvel comics. "We'd both been abandoned by our fathers," says Fitzpatrick, "but I just remember us laughing all the time. Phil was a great prankster and a joker."

Lynott's inspiration for *Vagabonds*' title, Fitzpatrick says, was *Playboy Of The Western World*. This was the great Irish playwright JM Synge's 1907 tale depicting the rise and fall of Christy Mahon, who claims to have murdered his own father. "So now Phil wants to reinvent it with this black guy from the Crumlin Corner as the hero," says Fitzpatrick. "Phillip liked to portray himself as this hard guy, but he wasn't, really. He was very well brought-up by his granny, and she'd have clipped him round the ear if he wasn't well-mannered. Irish grannies are lethal."

When Fitzpatrick was commissioned to paint the cover art for *Vagabonds*, the broad concept was "a kind of cosmic cowboy or space gypsies thing. I had a rough done which Phillip loved, but when we expanded the design to a gatefold he had some other thoughts. He asked if we could have a bit of old Ireland in there without making it look like a folk LP."

Fitzpatrick duly added the entrance stone to the Neolithic passage tomb at Newgrange in County Meath, a truly ancient structure built before Stonehenge and the Pyramids, in around 3200 BC.

Lynott had learned about the Newgrange tomb's mystical significance while still at school, and loved Fitzpatrick's though provoking addition. Still, he had one more request:

"He asked me to paint in a spider, a frog and a mouse", Fitzpatrick says, laughing. "They're tiny little details. Phil was the spider, with his long legs, obviously, but other than that I don't know why he wanted those creatures."

Fifty years on, Brian Downey is able to shed light: "They were our nicknames – Phil was spider, and Eric was frog jaws, because he would pull these daft, frog-like faces. I was the dormouse; our manager, Ted Carroll, had a lot of trouble getting me out of bed after gigs."

Vagabonds Of The Western World was another case of Lynott writing about what he knew – or wanted to become. *Black Boys On The Corner* was self-explanatory. Elsewhere, *The Rocker* was the prototype for Lizzy's later, mid-to-late-70s band-as-gang zenith. 'Down at the juke joint me and the boys are stompin,' Lynott sang, 'Bippin' an' boppin' and telling

a dirty joke or two.' Here was the future protagonist of *The Boys Are Back In Town*, already cock-sure, or at least trying to be.

Little Girl In Bloom was more mysterious; deeply personal. Downey and Bell didn't know it at the time, but Lynott had written it about Carole Stephen, a former girlfriend he'd got pregnant.

"Later on I asked about it," says Downey, >



Yet, for all Lynott's obvious gifts, the *Shades Of A Blue Orphanage* album lacked power and direction. The handful of reviews it received were non-committal or, worse, patronising. "It was a depressing time for the band", Lynott would later tell music paper *Sounds*. "We didn't feel the record sounded like us – it lacked the balls, the energy."

Lizzy's unlikely route out of the doldrums was *Whiskey In The Jar*. Their manager Ted Carroll had heard Lynott and Bell idly strum it at rehearsals, and smelled a hit. Decca needed a single from the band, and Lynott wanted to put forward a new song, *Black Boys On The Corner*, but was dissuaded.

Bell wasn't keen to cover *Whiskey In The Jar* either, but accepted the challenge: how could he reinvent this old warhorse, make it his own? Travelling back from a gig one night, Lynott's cassette tape of Irish folk legends The Chieftans proved inspirational. "That's where I got the idea for the intro guitar solo," says Bell. "The sustained notes were my version of the uilleann pipes."

The main guitar solo on the single, meanwhile,

was Bell's finest hour. With the rest of the track already recorded, he spent days at home perfecting it. "Meanwhile, I'm getting a three-pronged attack from Decca, management and Phil: 'When are you going to record your fucking solo?' Every note was composed, so it fitted like a glove", adds Bell. "My playing on that song is all about the Irish phrasing – people

"I still pass the house that Phil and Eric rented almost every day, and I often think about the wild parties we had."

Brian Downey

like Rory Gallagher and myself had it from our showband days."

Although hopes were high for *Vagabonds* after *Whiskey's* UK Top 10 success, Lizzy were still skint. One day they were hanging with Olivia Newton-John at *Top Of The Pops* – "She was very complimentary," remembers Downey – the next it was back to earth with a bang. "When I lived with



Lighting a fire. But the original trio's flame would soon be extinguished. Thin Lizzy in 1973: (l-r) Eric Bell, Phil Lynott, Brian Downey.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY

"and Phil told me that Carole had had to go to Cork to have the baby. Then years later, this guy [Lynott and Stephen's son, now named Macdaragh Lambe] called me up and said: 'I'm just outside Clontarf. Can we meet for a drink?' I immediately recognised him at the pub, because he had the same physique as Phil, even some of the same facial expressions. He told me he'd been taken out of an orphanage and brought up in County Kildare. He wanted to know if his mum and Phil had been a one-night stand. I told him no, Phil and his mum had been a couple for around a year. I think he was pleased about that."

Still consummate road hounds, Thin Lizzy toured the *Vagabonds Of The Western World* album like their lives depended on it. Third single *The Rocker* reached No.11 in Ireland in November 1973, but bombed in the UK. Morale became especially low, and Lynott was already considering his options. He even jammed with Deep Purple's Ritchie Blackmore and Ian Paice on the sly.

Downey remembers Bell and Lynott having "a bit of a scuffle" on tour in Germany. Meanwhile, he was stuck in the middle, ever the diplomat.

"Yes, Phillip was lucky to have Brian," says Jim Fitzpatrick. "He was kind and a very calming influence. You'd need to shoot Brian in the foot before he would say: 'Fuck you!'"

"Phillip was the main man, of course," Fitzpatrick adds, "but you have to give a lot of credit to Eric, too. Like Gary [Moore] or Robbo [Brian Robertson], he was an incredible guitarist, but I always thought he was a troubled genius. With the touring, it got up Eric's nose doing the

same thing every night, and I'm not really sure he was cut out for it. And whenever I spoke to Phil, I always got the impression that he was worried about Eric leaving."

When Lizzy played Belfast's Queens University that New Year's Eve, everything came to a head. Bell had the hometown blues and started drinking heavily from early afternoon. When Lizzy went on stage he was blotto; so royally pissed that he didn't know which song he was blundering through. At 26, Bell was also ripe for a bit of self-sabotage. He threw his guitar in the air and rampaged into his amp and speaker cabinets, kicking them over before stumbling into the

"They were our nicknames. Phil was spider, and Eric was frog jaws. I was the dormouse."

Brian Downey

wings. A furious Lynott and Downey had to finish the set as a two-piece.

The next day, Lynott told management he couldn't continue with Lizzy's volatile guitarist. But the way Bell tells it, he had already decided to quit, and, as Downey acknowledges, there were mitigating circumstances at play.

"You have to remember that Eric's wife had just left him and gone off to Canada with their son," says the drummer. "She wasn't just down in Cork, you know? It was a very upsetting time for Eric, and I think a bit of depression was setting in."

"Yes, that's exactly right," agrees Bell. "I can't tell

you how low I was at that point. I ended up in this poxy little attic, smoking too much dope and spending all my money on cheap wine. Then my doctor prescribed Librium, and that joined the hash and the sherry. Oh my god! I basically left the planet."

Fifty years on, both Bell and Downey can look back at the *Vagabonds* era fondly.

"There was a time when I thought: 'Did I really play in Thin Lizzy?'" says Bell. "But now, thank the Lord, those first three Lizzy LPs are being recognised again, and I don't feel like I'm being written out of the story."

"*Vagabonds Of The Western World* is one of my favourite Thin Lizzy albums because it was so diverse, so transitional," says Downey. "It's also where you really get to hear Phil the poet."

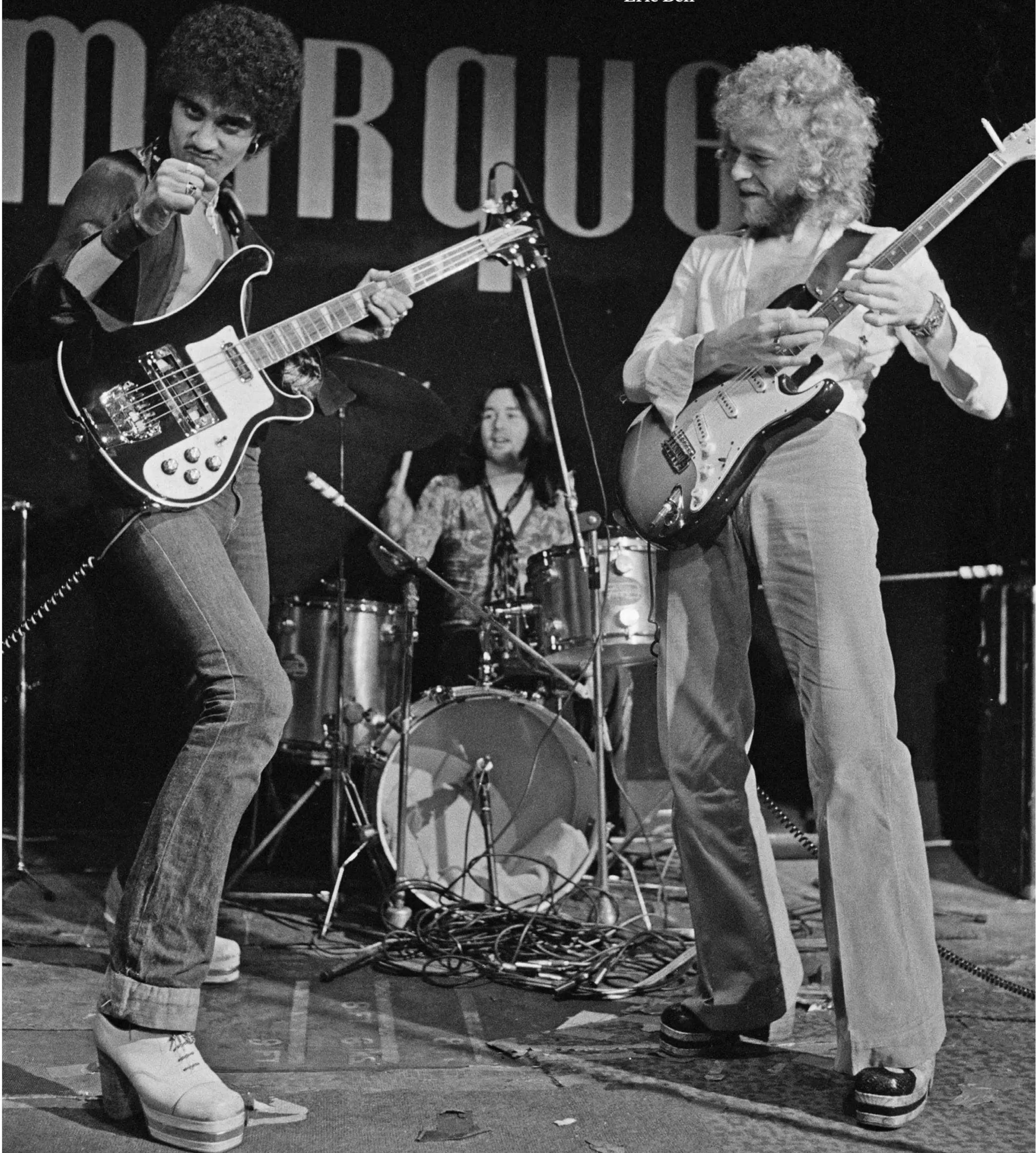
In June 1974, Lizzy would re-boot with the vaunted twin-guitar power of Brian Robertson and Scott Gorham, but Jim Fitzpatrick, for one, says we should not forget the magnificence and significance of Lizzy's first line-up.

"That sound that early Thin Lizzy had, it was very lyrical," he says. "I loved the stance that Phillip took, and I always thought he had the potential to become a great Irish poet. But the demands of rock lyrics are different, and they need to have an immediacy, which in my opinion didn't help Phillip. I don't say this lightly, but I believe he died as he lived: a frustrated artist. Phillip was an Irish Mick who wanted to be a poet, not a rock star." 🎸

Vagabonds Of The Western World 50th Anniversary Super Deluxe Edition is out now via Decca.

|||||
“People in Dublin thought we’d made it and were
living like kings. Little did they know.”

Eric Bell



Thin Lizzy at the
Marquee club in London,
November 13, 1973



In 1993 **Guns N' Roses** released *The Spaghetti Incident?*, an album of covers, and brought a load of mostly obscure, mostly punk-rock tracks to a wider audience. We take a look at the originals that fired up Axl and co. enough to want to record their own versions.

Words: **Dave Everley**

Thirty years after it was released, *The Spaghetti Incident?* remains the strangest and most misunderstood album Guns N' Roses released.

Coming on the heels of the blockbusting *Use Your Illusion* pair, this collection of (mostly) punk covers recorded during the UYI sessions and between dates on the subsequent tour was a curve ball from one of the biggest rock bands on the planet.

"These were all songs we played in soundcheck or live over the years," GN'R bassist Duff McKagan explains to *Classic Rock*. "There was no plan to start with. We recorded a few songs, and then it was like, let's just make a record."

Guns N' Roses were a hard rock band with punk rock in their hearts. Duff had played in punk bands The Fartz and The Fastbacks in his native Seattle, but everyone was on board.

"It was Axl who loved the UK Subs, he found *Down On The Farm*," says Duff. "We figured, if we make this record and it sells, then if nothing else some of our heroes can get some royalties."

The reviews that greeted *The Spaghetti Incident?* upon its release in November 1993 veered between the perplexed and the hostile. It sold just a million copies in the US – small change next to *Appetite For Destruction*, but enough to boost both the profile and the bank balance of those who wrote the songs that GN'R had covered on it. These are the stories behind those original songs.

Since I Don't Have You **THE SKYLINERS**

The Spaghetti Incident? may have been a Guns N' Roses punk-rock covers album, and the most punk-rock thing they did on it was to kick the whole thing off with an unironic cover of Pittsburgh doo-wop group The Skyliners' 1958 single *Since I Don't Have You*.

The song dated back to an era when rock'n'roll had yet to fully get its claws into America's youth. In their pressed suits, shirts and ties – and in the case of co-vocalist Janet Vogel, billowing dress – The Skyliners looked more like trainee accountants than like pop stars, but their version of *Since I Don't Have You* reached No.12 in the US in early 1959. In a 1993 radio interview, Slash revealed that Axl constantly sang the song when the two of them lived together during GN'R's early days. "I don't know why I really liked that song, I just did," Axl said, adding wryly: "Punk rock at its finest."

New Rose **THE DAMNED**

It's the greatest recycled intro of all time: "Is she really going out with him?" First heard in 1964 as the opening of The Shangri-Las' immaculate teenage death-ride anthem *Leader Of The Pack*, it was repurposed 12 years later by The Damned for *New Rose*, their debut single and the first by a British punk band.

"Dave [Vainian, singer] was waiting for the drums to start up, and he goes: 'Is she really going out with him?'" original Damned guitarist Brian James says of the Shangri-Las homage. "We didn't even know Nick [Lowe, producer] left it in until we heard the single for the first time."

Devious or not, it fired the starting pistol for an entire movement. James had written the *New Rose* riff while he was temporarily living in Belgium with his pre-Damned band Bastard. "The drummer couldn't get his head around it, so I sat on it," says James. ➤

"We figured if we make this record and it sells, then if nothing else some of our heroes can get some royalties."

Duff McKagan





The Skyliners

American accent on the other end of the line introduced himself as Duff McKagan. He was at a party in Los Angeles with the Subs' then-manager, and he wanted to know if it would be okay if his band, Guns N' Roses, covered Harpers band the UK Subs' song *Down On The Farm*. "Sure," said Harper, then went back to sleep.

Originally appearing on the Subs' 1982 album *Endangered Species*, *Down On The Farm* is one of punk's great anthems of

boredom. "All I need is some inspiration, before I do somebody some harm," Harper drawls blankly at the start of the track. But this was no nihilistic rant at the futility of life. It was literally about being cooped up on a farm – specifically, Jacob's Farm, a residential studio in Surrey.

"Lovely place," Harper says now. "But I was trying to write lyrics for this brilliant music Alvin [Gibbs, Subs bassist] had come up with, and failing."

Stuck in the studio while his bandmates relaxed in the farm's pool, Harper became increasingly frustrated. "I started feeling really depressed. And that's when it all came along."

The finished song barely keeps a lid on its frustration. '*Boredom eats me like cancer*,' sings Harper, adding the coup de grace towards the song's conclusion: '*Everything smells like horseshit, down here on the farm*.' "That was true," he says. "There was a stable with horses. Everything did smell like horseshit. The owners thought it was funny."

Guns N' Roses' version of the song made its first appearance at the Farm Aid festival in Indianapolis in April 1990, before they recorded a faithful version – give or take Axl's Dick Van Dyke London accent – for *The Spaghetti Incident?*. It got a run out on the band's last tour, most notably at the Glastonbury festival at Worthy Farm, where the '*everything smells like horse shit*' line came with piquancy.

"It's such a simple piece of music, but so effective," says Harper, who has been known to introduce it as "a cover of a Guns N' Roses song". The only line that makes him wince now is: '*I'd rather be back in Soho, than down on the farm*.'

"That's turned on me now," he says. "I'd rather be anywhere else on the planet than there these days."

"None of us gave a f**k about having the first punk single. It was only the managers who cared."

The Damned's Brian James on *New Rose*

He had more luck when he returned to London after Bastard fell apart in late 1974. The following year, he began putting together the band that would become The Damned, starting with drummer Rat Scabies (real name Chris Millar).

"I played him that riff and he picked up on it straight away," says James. "This was when it was just the two of us – Captain [Sensible, bassist] wasn't even on the scene then."

James fleshed out the song in less than three hours in his flat in Kilburn. The amphetamine drum tattoo that kicks everything off came from Scabies. "I said: 'Let's have some jungle drums as an intro.' And Rat did something totally unexpected. It was crazy from the outset."

James's lyrics matched the song's musical endorphin rush. It wasn't about a woman, says the guitarist, so much as a feeling. "The only thing I can think of is that it must have been about the punk scene. Suddenly there was a bunch people who loved The Stooges and the MC5 as much as I did."

New Rose was released as a single in October 1976 on Stiff Records, beating the Sex Pistols' *Anarchy In The UK* by three months. "None of us gave a fuck about having the first punk single," says James. "It was only the managers who cared about all that."

After the Damned's temporary split in 1978, James went on to form Lords Of The New Church. In August 1986, the Lords played a show in Glendora, just outside LA. The support act that night were a pre-fame Guns N' Roses.

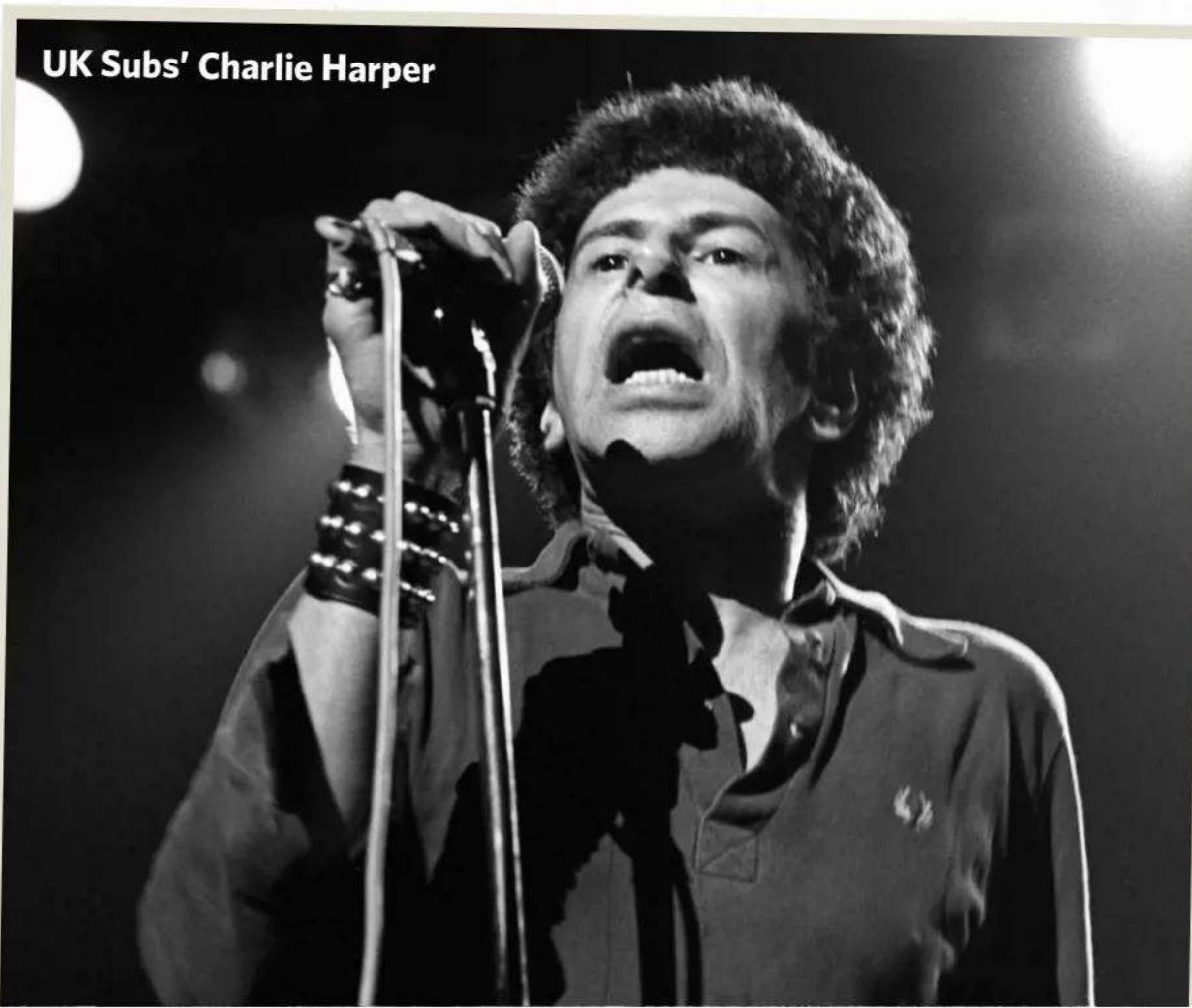
"All I remember is their drummer had a leopardskin-covered drum kit," says James. "A couple of years later they were everywhere."

The circle was completed when GN'R covered *New Rose* on *The Spaghetti Incident?* – which James only found out via an article in *Rolling Stone*: "They asked Slash what he'd been recording lately, and he said they'd done a Wings song and *New Rose*. I thought: 'Fucking hell! I might make some money from it for the first time in my life!'"

Down On The Farm

UK SUBS

It was the middle of the night in London, some time at the end of the 80s, when Charlie Harper was woken up by his phone ringing. A guy with an



UK Subs' Charlie Harper



Iggy Pop



New York Dolls

“Axl called Slash and said: ‘Let’s get the band together, we’re covering this Dead Boys song.’”

Michael Monroe

Human Being THE NEW YORK DOLLS

The New York Dolls’ self-titled 1972 debut album is one of the foundation stones of both punk and 80s glam-rock – a staggering, slurring missive from the gutters of the Big Apple, complete with bird’s-nest hair and lipstick smears.

Prophetically titled second album *Too Much Too Soon*, which stripped away what vestiges of professionalism had been present on the debut, sounded like the work of a band who could barely stand upright. Never more so than on final track *Human Being*, a barely produced blast of hissing punk noise that buried singer David Johansen’s sneers and howls deep within layers of fuzzy guitars, that sounded like they couldn’t wait to leave the studio to get their next fix.

Guns N’ Roses’ version buffed up the sound into something listenable – how could they not have? – but lost some of the original’s band-in-the-process-of-falling-apart anti-charm in the process.

Raw Power THE STOOGES

Stooges fan David Bowie had taken on the task of producing The Stooges’ third album, *Raw Power*, partly hoping his own growing fame would finally help catapult them to stardom. But it wasn’t to be. A combination of bad drug habits, volatile personalities and Bowie’s underpowered production meant *Raw Power* barely got off the ground. The Stooges themselves fell apart a year

later following a riotous final gig in which Iggy Pop took on a whole chapter of Hells Angels, but their fucked-up spirit had seeped into the very bones of rock’n’roll.

Guns N’ Roses could match The Stooges for debauchery, and laid down two Stooges covers for *The Spaghetti Incident?*: an instrumental version of *Down On The Street* from 1970’s *Funhouse*, and the Duff McKagan-sung *Raw Power*. The latter won the day, and survives in GN’R’s set-lists to this day, while Iggy returned the favour by having Duff appear on his most recent album, *Every Loser*.

Ain’t It Fun DEAD BOYS

Dead Boys were the troglodyte wing of the 70s New York punk scene. Ditching arty intellectualism, the transplanted Clevelanders were an explosion of instinct and attitude, propelled by Cheetah Chrome’s broken-glass guitar and charisma-bomb frontman Stiv Bators’s playing-dumb sneer.

Ain’t It Fun began life as a song by Chrome’s previous band, Rocket From The Tombs. In its original incarnation, it



Dead Boys’ Stiv Bators
(Below: T.Rex’s Marc Bolan)

was five and half minutes of post-Watergate nihilism with a side-order of provocation: “Ain’t it fun when you tell her she’s just a c**t,” drawled RFTT singer David Thomas, before the track exploded into shards of noise.

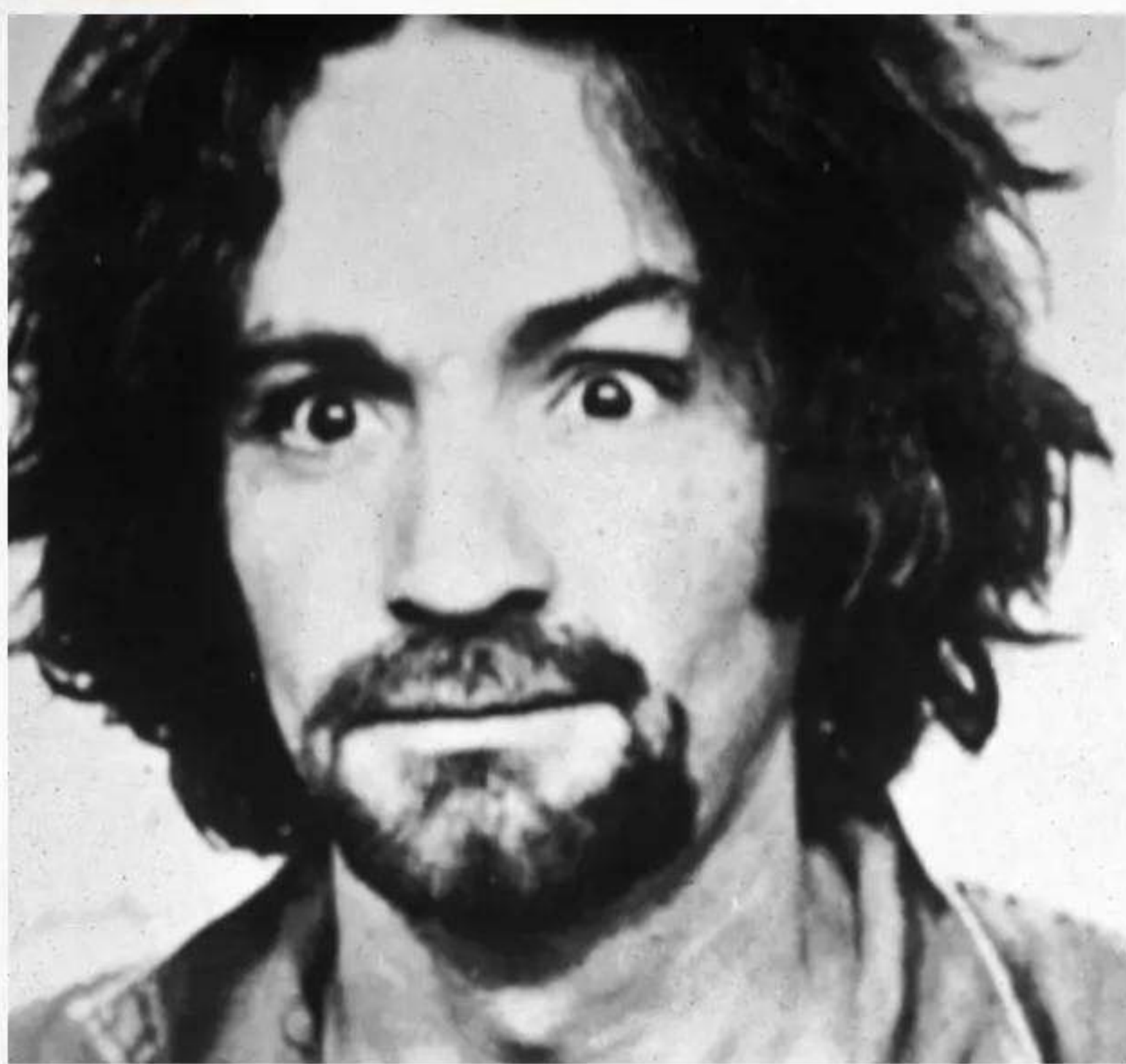
The Dead Boys kept the neutron-star energy that burned at its heart, but added a wired edge that the original lacked, with Bators – one part Johnny Rotten and one part Sid Vicious – shifting from snivelling whisper to mush-mouthed aggro in an instant.

It was the Dead Boys’ version that Guns N’ Roses used as a touchstone for their own cover. The inspiration came via ex-Hanoi Rocks frontman Mike Monroe, a friend of both Bators and Axl Rose. When Axl told Monroe he wasn’t familiar with the Dead Boys, Monroe made him a cassette.

“We were driving around Hollywood in Axl’s car when *Ain’t It Fun* came on. Axl said: ‘Wow, this a great song,’ Monroe, who appeared on the finished version, told *Classic Rock*. “He immediately called Slash and said: ‘Let’s get the band together, we’re covering this Dead Boys song.’” ➤



GUNS N' ROSES



Clockwise from top left:
Charles Manson, Misfits,
Johnny Thunders

Buick Mackane (Big Dumb Sex)

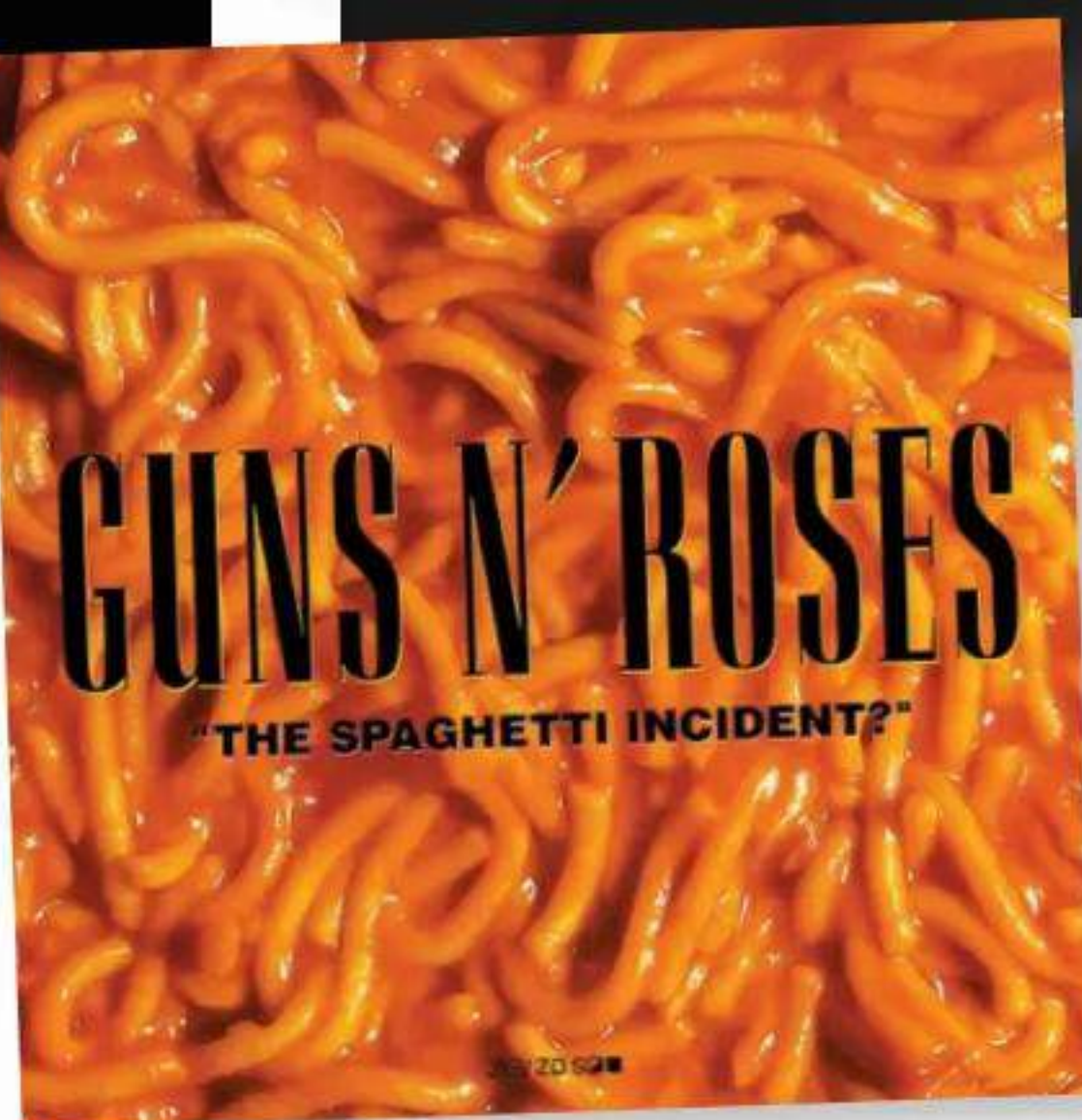
T.REX/SOUNDGARDEN

Marc Bolan described T.Rex's *Buick Mackane* as "Zep Rex" — a nod to the fact that it was heavier than the cosmic-dandy glam-rock that had propelled Bolan's group to fame. GN'R took it one step further with their version of the 1973 song from T.Rex's *The Slider* album, dropping in a burst of Soundgarden's *Big Dumb Sex* towards the end.

The latter was a curious choice — Soundgarden's *Big Dumb Sex*, which appeared on 1989's *Louder Than Love*, was a mocking take-down of what guitarist Kim Thayil called "butt rock" and "stupid music".

It's not clear whether they had Guns N' Roses in mind when they wrote it, although in his defence, Axl had been a cheerleader for the Soundgarden long before the rest of the world caught on. When in a 1989 interview *Rolling Stone* asked him who he'd been listening to, he replied: "I enjoy Soundgarden. The singer just buries me."

He made good on his fandom by inviting the Seattle band to open for GN'R and Metallica on their co-headlining tour in 1991. Two years later, that *Buick Mackane/Big Dumb Sex* mash-up proved he was either in on the joke or completely oblivious to it.



Hair Of The Dog

NAZARETH

When Scottish rockers Nazareth told their label, A&M, that they planned to call their new album *Son Of A Bitch*, they got a swift response. "They went: 'No, you can't do that, we won't be able to sell it,'" says bassist Pete Agnew. "We went: 'Hang on, if John Wayne can say it, why can't we?' But they weren't having it."

Agnew still calls the 1975 album, and its barrelling title track, *Son Of A Bitch* today, although the rest of the world knows it as *Hair Of The Dog* (a play on 'Heir Of The Dog', itself a twist on that original title). That song, featuring singer Dan McCafferty's wind-tunnel vocal, a killer talk-box guitar solo from guitarist Manny Charlton and more cowbell than is legal in some US states, is the tale of an alluring but devious woman who finally meets her match. 'Now you're messing with a son of a bitch,' McCafferty howls gleefully.

"There was no plan to start with. We recorded a few songs, and then it was like, let's just make a record."

Duff McKagan

The song caught the attention of a young Axl Rose, whose rasping howl sailed close to McCafferty's. Axl enlisted Manny Charlton to produce an early, pre-*Appetite For Destruction* demo, but the guitarist grumbled that he couldn't get all of the band in the studio at the same time.

When Nazareth played half a dozen dates in California in April 1988, Guns N' Roses turned up to all of them. "They were nice kids," says Agnew. "Very polite."

It was no surprise that they chose to cover *Hair Of The Dog* on *The Spaghetti Incident?*, cheekily adding a snippet of *Day Tripper* on the end in acknowledgement of the original's passing similarity to The Beatles song.

"It's good, but they didn't really do much with it," Agnew says of GN'R's version of his own band's song. "We had great success covering other people's songs, but we always put our own stamp on it. I think Axl just wanted to sing 'son of a bitch'."



Clockwise from top left:
Fear's Lee Ving, Sex Pistols'
Paul Cooke and Steve Jones,
Nazareth



Attitude MISFITS

It was Metallica, not Guns N' Roses, who put America's greatest cult punk band back on the map five years after they split. Metallica's 1987 mash-up of New Jersey horror-punks Misfits' *Last Caress* and *Green Hell* introduced the Glenn Danzig-fronted band to a generation of thrash kids.

GN'R may have been late out of the gate with their own Misfits cover, but they picked a doozy. *Attitude* was a rush of catchy, goth-tinged punk'n'roll that appeared on the B-side of the New Jersey band's 1978 single *Bullet*. Misfits looked like a bunch of grave diggers at a Halloween party, with thick black eyeliner and distinctive 'devilocks'—fringes styled forward into a point that hung down to their chins.

"We weren't drug-shooting beatnik Bowery Boys," founding bassist Jerry Only says. "That's why we came up with the horror thing. We loved horror films, sci-fi, B-movies."

Attitude wasn't a horror-punk track so much as a blast of pure, well, attitude. "When we did the lines 'I got some fuckin' attitude', nobody was saying 'fuck' every second word in 1978," says Only. "Back then we were doing that to be socially obnoxious."

Attitude was lined up to appear on Misfits' debut album, *Static Age*, but label disinterest and an

acrimonious split with Danzig meant the record remained unreleased until 1997, four years after GN'R hopped on the Misfits bandwagon.

Today, Danzig and Only have patched up their differences and are again playing under the Misfits name, headlining festivals and arenas. America's greatest cult punk band are a cult no longer.

Black Leather SEX PISTOLS

Black Leather might be credited to the Sex Pistols, but the band that recorded it wasn't just unrecognisable from the one that had made *Never Mind The Bollocks*, they didn't even exist by the time it snuck out in 1980.

After Johnny Rotten left following a disastrous US tour in January 1978 to form PiL, manager Malcolm McLaren urged guitarist Steve Jones, drummer Paul Cook and doomed bassist Sid Vicious to carry on without the talismanic singer.

In the spring of 1978, this rump Sex Pistols entered the studio to record a grab-bag of songs for the soundtrack to an entertainingly shambolic film-come-art-statement McLaren was planning called *The Great Rock'N'Roll Swindle*. Among them

was *Black Leather*, a bondage-fixated slab of buffed-up rock'n'roll with Jones on vocals and bass as well as guitar.

The first the world heard of *Black Leather* was when it was covered by LA punks The Runaways on their 1978 album *And Now... The Runaways*. Perversely, McLaren opted to drop the Jones/Cook version from *The Great Rock'N'Roll Swindle* when the film was released in 1980. Instead it slipped onto the seven-inch singles collection *Pistols Pack*, by which time Jones and Cook had formed their new band The Professionals (the seeds of that group were undeniably in *Black Leather*).

By the end of the 80s, Jones had relocated to LA and released two solo albums, *Mercy* and *Fire And Gasoline*, the latter including a version of another Pistols semi-obscure, *I Did U No Wrong*. And singing backing vocals on that cover? Axl Rose.

You Can't Put Your Arms Around A Memory JOHNNY THUNDERS

Steve Lillywhite was 23 years old and barely out of the gate career-wise when he signed on to co-produce Johnny Thunders's debut solo album, *So Alone*, in early 1978. As a staff producer at Island Records, he'd worked with the John Foxx-fronted Ultravox! and Eddie And The Hot Rods, among



The Spaghetti Incident? GN'R line-up at the 1992 MTV VMAs: (l-r) Duff McKagan, Gilby Clark, Axl Rose, Slash, Dizzy Reed and Matt Sorum.

“That song doesn’t sound perfect. Some might say the guitar is out of tune. But that’s why it resonates so well – there’s a humanity to it.”

Producer Steve Lillywhite on *You Can’t Put Your Arms Around A Memory*

others, but the inelegantly wasted ex-New York Dolls and Heartbreakers guitarist was a different prospect altogether.

“Johnny was friends with my room-mate and so I got to know him,” Lillywhite tells *Classic Rock*. “The Heartbreakers album [1977’s *L.A.M.F.*] didn’t sound great, so I said: ‘Let me do your solo album. I’ll guarantee you get a good-sounding record.’ Of course, I was bluffing completely.”

Lillywhite and Thunders entered The Fallout Shelter, a studio in the dingy basement of Island’s West London offices. “It was this funky old studio with no natural light,” says Lillywhite. “It was the perfect way to record Johnny Thunders.”

Thunders was deep in the grip of heroin addiction. “He was a lovely, lovely guy – when you got him on a good day,” says Lillywhite. The guitarist’s well-connected manager, BP Fallon, recruited a stellar cast list to play on the album, including Phil Lynott, Steve Marriott, Sex Pistols duo Steve Jones and Paul Cook, and Only Ones frontman Peter Perrett.

It was Perrett, himself no stranger to the needle, who would help bring the album’s stand-out track – and the highlight of Thunders’s solo career – to life. *You Can’t Put Your Arms Around A Memory* was a broken-down ballad that found this strung-out New York alley cat at his most vulnerable.

“Peter helped me understand the sort of person Johnny was,” says Lillywhite. “Get him today, Steve, because he’s not hurting, he’s on good form.’ Because on other days he’d be nodding off all the time.”

Also playing on the track were Eddie And The

Hot Rods bassist Paul Grey and Only Ones drummer Mike Kellie. Perrett provided guitar and backing vocals, although *You Can’t Put Your Arms Around A Memory* was pure Thunders. Part junkie confessional, part snarl of defiance, it was the sound of a man writing his epitaph – his own *My Way*.

It would be Thunders fanatic Duff McKagan who sang on GN’R’s cover of the song, adding an impromptu tribute to the guitarist, who died of drug-related causes in 1991.

“That song doesn’t sound perfect by modern thinking,” Lillywhite says of the original. “Some might say the guitar is out of tune. But that’s why it resonates so well, there’s a humanity to it.”

I Don’t Care About You FEAR

Even by the standards of LA’s early punk scene, Fear thrived on provocation. They were formed by jazz and blues-loving ex-soldier Lee Capallero, who moved cross country to California, and reinvented himself as Lee Ving and as American punk’s button-pusher-in-chief.

Fear’s 1983 debut album, *The Record*, was a satirical dissection of modern American culture, poking fun at everything from arty hipsters to left-leaning punk rockers. The bluntly titled *I Don’t Care About You* wrapped up their whole ethos in two minutes of roaring rock’n’roll. ‘I don’t care about you, fuck you!’ Ving bawled on the chorus, although a weird kind of compassion shone through when

he sang: ‘I’ve seen a old man have a heart attack in Manhattan/Well he died while we just stood there lookin’ at him’. Cynical, or empathetic? Maybe Guns N’ Roses noticed a little bit of both in it.

Look At Your Game, Girl CHARLES MANSON

In the late 60s, Charles Manson pursued two parallel careers: one as a musician, the other as a racist, psychopathic cult leader. Unfortunately for the seven people who died at the hands of his followers, he was more successful at the latter than the former, although that didn’t stop him amassing a stockpile of songs that he hoped would turn him into a star.

Among them was *Look At Your Game, Girl*, a pared-down acoustic track that sounded like the work of a fifth-rate LA troubadour. Written in 1968, the song remained on the shelf for a couple of years, when it was opportunistically released as a single just as Manson and his acolytes went on trial for murder.

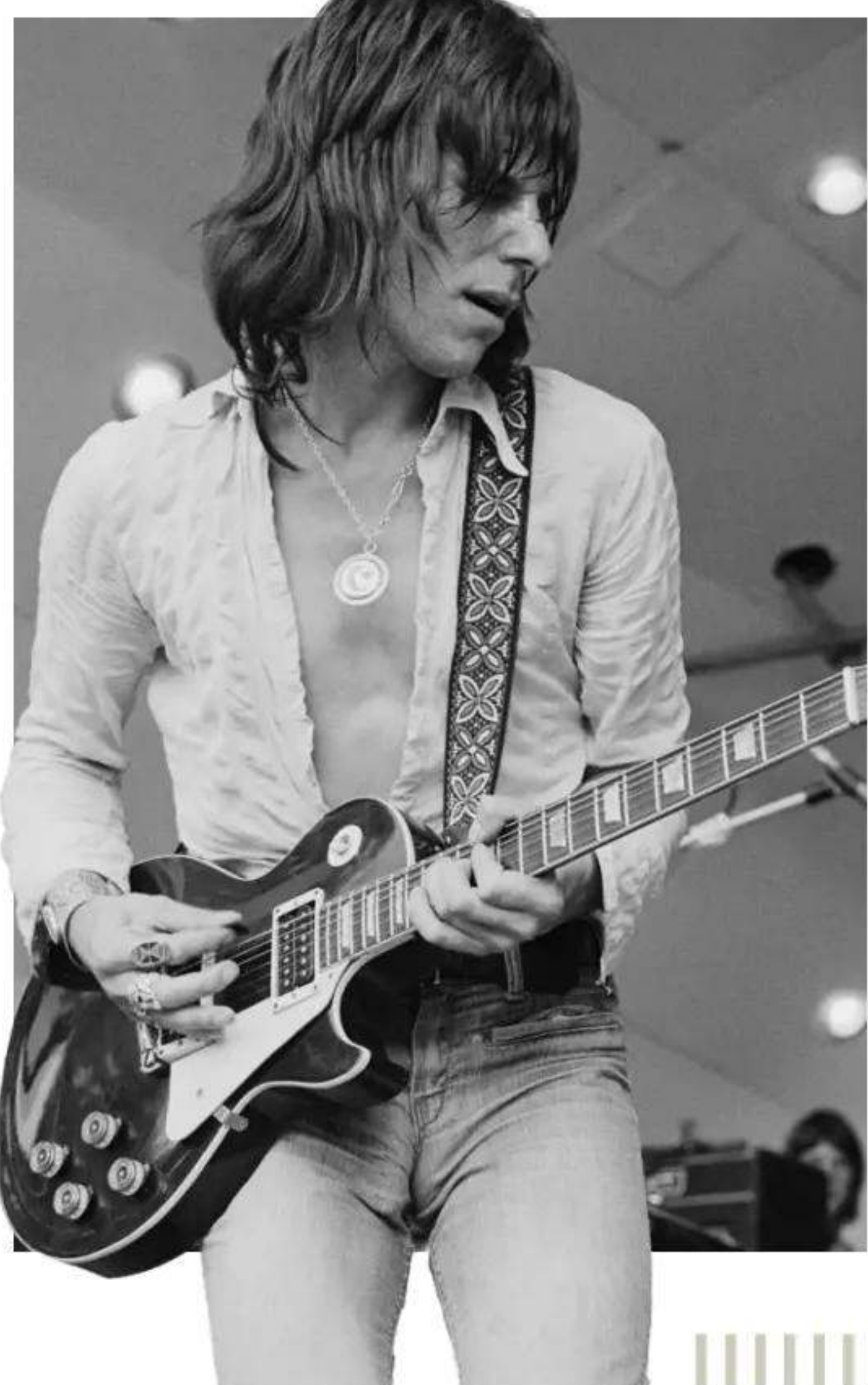
Axl Rose discovered the track on the 1970 album *Lie: The Love And Terror Cult*, and figured Manson’s status as an American anti-hero chimed with his band’s. The decision to cover it as an uncredited bonus track on *The Spaghetti Incident?* backfired – the outrage that greeted it prompted the band to donate performance royalties to an environmental charity. But it was too little too late – an album that was conceived with the noblest of intentions ended on a sour note. ❷



The Soundtrack Of My Life

Stranglers
bassist/vocalist
Jean-Jacques Burnel on the
records, artists
and gigs that are of
lasting significance
to him.

Interview: **Ian Fortnam**



BECK: MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY; JJBURNEL: JOSEPH BRANSTON/FUTURE PUBLISHING PLC

“Jeff Beck has got to be the greatest guitarist in rock. He’s the most innovative.”

Jean-Jacques Burnel has been The Stranglers’ bass guitarist for almost half a century. Formed in 1974, the band found themselves at the forefront of the UK punk explosion, enjoying a brace of top-five albums in 1977 alone (a year that also saw Shidokan Karate Black Belt JJ narrowly side-step conscription into the French army and appear as a nude centrefold in the Christmas NME). “It’s cruel,” he says of his Soundtrack experience “It’s like asking: ‘Who’s your favourite child?’”

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

The first record I ever bought was *My Boy Lollipop* by Millie, but my parents also had a tape recorder and I managed to record The Yardbirds’ *Heart Full Of Soul* off the radio. Now, I live in France, about fifteen minutes from Jim McCarty, the Yardbirds’ drummer, and we’ve got a blues band. We play John Mayall and Muddy Waters stuff in little pubs and bars for the sheer joy. He’s eighty years old and still plays like a god.

THE FIRST SONG I PERFORMED LIVE

Go Buddy Go. It’s a mix of the Beach Boys and *Hey Joe* by the Jimi Hendrix Experience. It’s the same chord sequence: C-G-D-A-E. It’s the first thing I wrote, so obviously I was quite happy to play it to anyone who’d listen to a fifteen-year old with an acoustic guitar.

THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

The album that marked me most – so much that I bought five copies to give to friends – was *L.A. Woman* by The Doors. A blues album, basically. My parents had a French restaurant in Godalming, and on Sunday night the local pub became the Gin Mill Blues Club. So I saw Peter Green’s Fleetwood Mac in front of about fifty people, Free when they were still called Black Cat Bones, Duster Bennett, and it’s stayed with me ever since.

THE SONGWRITER

Brian Wilson has got to be a contender. Mind you, Jeff Lynne’s also a genius, possibly as much as Brian Wilson. But I keep coming back to *Good Vibrations*. A masterpiece in three minutes. I wish I could do that. I tried on our last Stranglers album, *Dark Matters*. There’s a song on that, *White Stallions*: the closest the Stranglers have got to genius.

THE GUITAR HERO

Jeff Beck has got to be the greatest guitarist in rock. John McLaughlin is incredible, but for me Jeff Beck’s the most innovative. Maybe his music doesn’t touch me so much, but I’m in awe of his playing. When I was taking my O Levels we were listening to *Truth*, the Jeff Beck Group with Rod Stewart.

THE SINGER

It’s got to be Jim Morrison, hasn’t it? Morrison’s an amazing frontman, but there’s an amazing keyboard player and guitarist as well. The Doors were a band who could evoke something quite magical.

THE BEST COVER VERSION

Well, the only one I can think of is The Stranglers’ *Walk On By*. I was amazed that it did as well as it did, because we’d already given a free copy of it away with the first 75,000 copies of *Black And White*. Then we decided to release it as a single, and it still managed a bit of commercial success.

THE BEST RECORD I MADE

There are two records that I’m exceptionally proud of. One of which you will probably find unlistenable, but for various reasons I consider it genius. It’s called *The Gospel According To The Meninblack*. Most people probably won’t be able to listen to it these days, because you need the kind of attention span that no longer exists, but if you can last forty minutes... And *Dark Matters*. The stars aligned for that one. I’m sure you haven’t heard it, but it’s definitely worth a listen.

THE WORST RECORD I MADE

I think it’s called... [long pause]. I can’t even fucking remember, I’ve erased it from my mind. It was in the nineties.

MY GUILTY PLEASURE

The concept of a guilty pleasure probably comes from the Calvinistic beating-up of oneself for getting excited by something you feel you shouldn’t, but I don’t have any of that. I don’t feel guilty about any of my pleasures at all.

THE MOST UNDERRATED BAND EVER

The Hollies. They taught The Byrds how to do harmonies: Crosby, Stills and Young, all that lot. If you listen to The Hollies’ hits they’re all just incredible.

THE BEST LIVE ALBUM

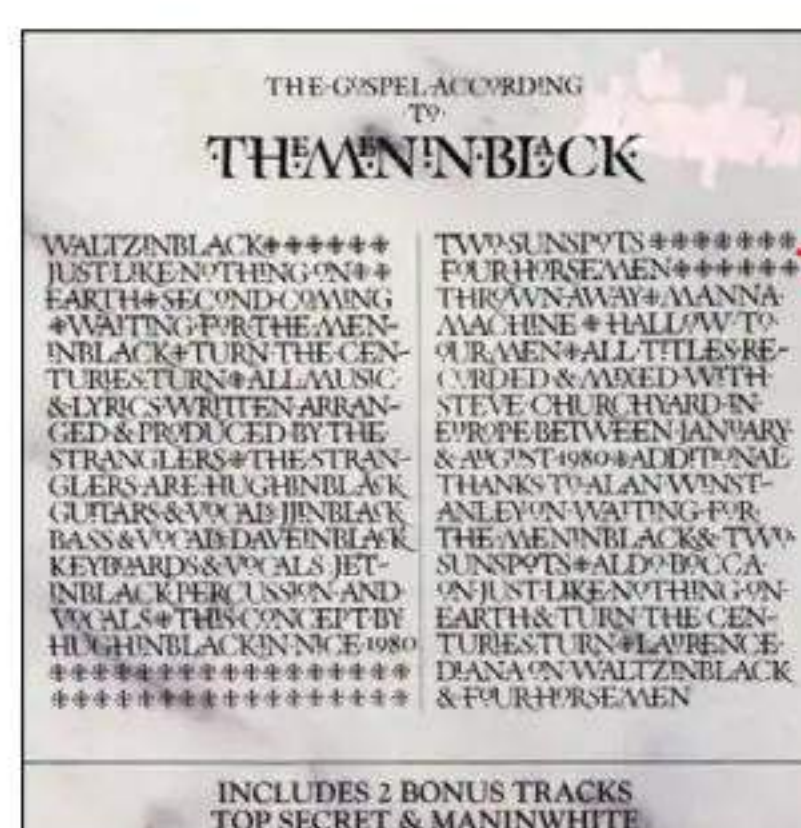
Lou Reed Live. I can’t remember any of the other stuff on it, but I was really impressed by Aynsley Dunbar’s drum intro to *Oh Jim*.

MY SATURDAY NIGHT/PARTY SONG

I don’t party, but I do love listening to John Field, Chopin and Debussy. There was an all-synthesiser album in the early seventies called *Snowflakes Are Dancing* by a Japanese guy called Tomita. It’s actually reinterpreted works by Debussy. So I discovered Debussy’s music through electronica, which was perfectly suited to his composition.

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

Oh Well (Pt. 2) by Peter Green’s Fleetwood Mac. He was quite troubled at the time. Or *The Raven* by The Stranglers. It’s often been used for funerals, actually, because a lot of people relate to its opening line: ‘Fly straight with perfection’.



THE
★CLASSIC★
Rock
INTERVIEW
**PAUL
RODGERS**

One of rock's all-time great vocalists looks back at his life and times with Free, Bad Company, The Firm and Queen, the tragedy of Paul Kossoff, his solo career, and why he probably owes the fact that he's still alive today to his involvement in martial arts.

Interview: **Mark Blake**

Yow!... all right, all right... It's a timeless performance: Paul Rodgers with Free, playing *All Right Now* at the Isle of Wight Festival in the summer of 1970. As the band chop away at the riff, Rodgers strikes a pose, with one knee cocked and a hand outstretched, like he's about to deliver one of Shakespeare's sonnets rather than *'There she stood, in the street, smiling from her head to her feet.'*

Rodgers sang into not one but two microphones that day. The doubling up was due to the requirements of the PA, but also magnified his image as a man whose voice couldn't be contained by just one. Paul Rodgers launched a thousand imitators, but the man with the flawless delivery (whom his former bandmate Jimmy Page calls "the Sam Cooke of rock") is a true original.

Born on December 17, 1949, Rodgers was the son of a Middlesbrough docker, who ignored his father's advice to "get a trade", and instead fled to London to try his luck in the music business.

Rodgers distilled his love of Wilson Pickett, Otis Redding and Muddy Waters into the hits *All Right Now* and *Wishing Well* with the pioneering blues-rockers Free. When Free imploded in 1973, Rodgers formed Bad Company and broke America with the chart-topping radio staples *Can't Get Enough*,

Feel Like Makin' Love and *Rock'n'roll Fantasy*. Since then, he's made solo and tribute albums, formed supergroup The Firm with Jimmy Page, and toured the world as guest vocalist with Queen.

Midnight Rose is Rodgers's first album of all-new songs since 2000, recorded with members of his solo group, released on the historic Sun Records label and produced by Bon Jovi/Metallica fixer Bob Rock and Rodgers's wife Cynthia Kereluk. "Yes, she kicks me up the arse, in every respect," offers her husband.

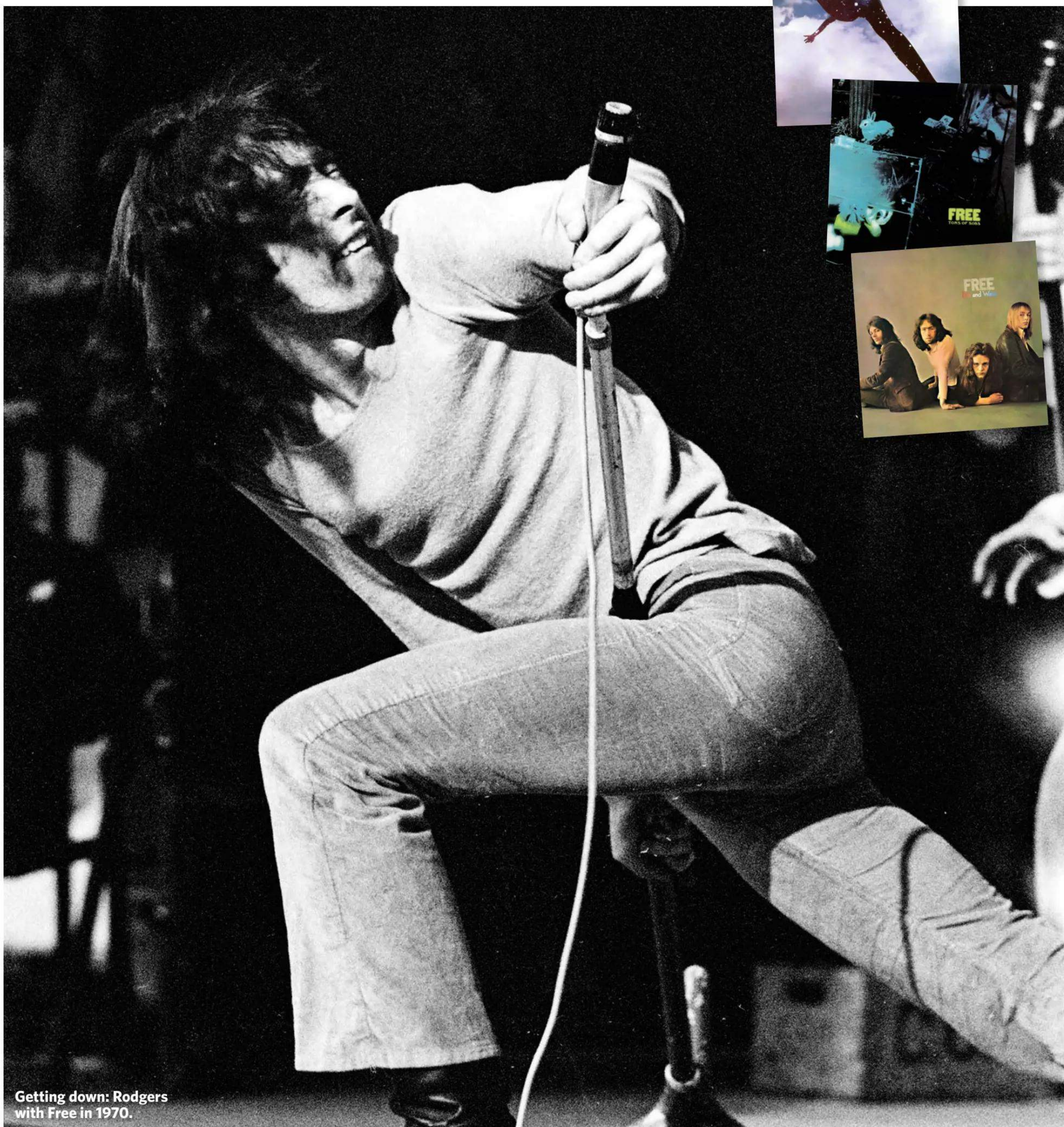
New songs such as *Living It Up* and *Highway Robber* either celebrate the music of Rodgers's youth or reference the outlaws and desperadoes of the Bad Company era, but reimagined through the eyes of their now 73-year-old writer.

Resplendent in a blue Hawaiian-style shirt and baseball cap, Rodgers joins *Classic Rock* from a quiet corner of his home in British Columbia. "I live in the Okanagan Valley, but there's enough English here for my tastes," he says.

While the 1970s were the era of excess and a "blur of fisticuffs", the modern-day Rodgers exudes a Zen-like calm and talks an awful lot about peace and love. In fact, "fucking" becomes "effing" in some of his answers, even if a glint in his eye suggests the old tearaway is still in there. That voice, of course, is as familiar as ever. ➤







Getting down: Rodgers with Free in 1970.

GETTY

“I liked Koss’s style. His playing and his humour. And I admired him because he had the longest, most beautiful hair – like a lion’s mane.”

How does it feel to be on the legendary Sun Records? Is this something of a teenage dream come true?

Who’d have thought it? When I was growing up it was home to Elvis Presley and all these other great artists. In my mind, though, there was never any possibility I would be on Sun Records.

Sun has a great logo too.

Yes, it’s like Harley-Davidson. It’s the Harley-Davidson of record labels.

This is your first album of all-new songs since 2000’s *Electric*. What kept you?

I had no intention of even making a new album. But covid brought everything to a screeching halt, and I was locked down with an acoustic guitar. I had nothing else to do but work on all the material I’d built up. After a while, I’m sitting there thinking: “I wonder if I can go in a studio...”

Some of these songs sound like a love letter to America.

Had I not heard American music – jazz, blues, soul and rock’n’roll – my life would have been vastly different. There likely wouldn’t have been Free or Bad Company. I owe a lot to the unique musicians who created that music.

You did *Straight Shooter* with Bad Company, now there’s a song here called *Photo Shooter*.

It’s about all the different places photographers find themselves, from fashion zones to war zones and places and spaces in between. Competing all

the while for that prized front-page spot. I compare this to how life can be, always pushing, driving, to be the best, and I wonder: “What does it matter?”

Let’s go back to the 1960s. Your teenage group The Roadrunners have moved from the Northeast to North London, and you were all living together. How bad did it get?

We were The Roadrunners but we became the Wildflowers [in 1967], and were introduced to a drummer called Andy whose parents were on holiday and let us stay at his place. We were four teenagers unsupervised, and we ate everything in the fridge and turned the place into a wreck. But Koss [future Free guitarist Paul Kossoff] lived around the corner and came over to jam with us.



“We [Free] were four separate guys at the beginning of the afternoon, and by the end of the evening we were a band.”

What were your first impressions of Paul Kossoff?

I liked Koss’s style. His playing and his humour. And I admired him because he had the longest, most beautiful hair – like a lion’s mane. He also had flared Levi’s, which you couldn’t buy in the stores. He bought two pairs of Levi’s every time and cut the sides out of one to put the ‘V’ in. I was like: “Wow, that’s so cool.”

The Wildflowers split, but you stayed behind in London. Were you pushing and striving more than the others?

My staying behind was what cemented mine and Koss’s relationship. When the other Wildflowers went back to Middlesbrough or did whatever they did, I was on my own with a load of wrecked equipment. I needed to reboot my career, as it were. I had four Shure SM57 microphones. I sold three, kept one and got myself a 50-watt Selmer amp. So I was back in business.

What happened next?

I joined a blues band called Brown Sugar, and was playing in a pub, when Koss showed up and asked to jam. He wanted me to join his band [Black Cat Bones], but I wanted us to start a new group.

Take us back to Free’s first jam together: April 19, 1968, at the Nag’s Head in Battersea.

That was where I met [bassist] Andy Fraser and Kirkie [drummer Simon Kirke] for the first time. [Rodgers’s mentor, British bluesman] Alexis Korner recommended Andy to us. We just played blues because everybody could play it straight away. Halfway through the day, we were doing *Moonshine*, one of the songs Koss and I had written together, and just at the point where it goes [sings] ‘I-I-I-I-I sit here alone’ Alexis walked in, sat down and said: “You sound like you’re a band now.” We were four separate guys at the beginning of the afternoon, and by the end of the evening we were a band. ➤



The beginning of a long road. The just-formed Free in 1968: (l-r) Paul Rodgers, Paul Kossoff, Simon Kirke, Andy Fraser.



Free at London’s Royal Albert Hall, London, February 1972.





Bad Company were great on stage, but off stage sometimes lived up to their name.

“Peter Grant put Bad Co right where Led Zeppelin were in terms of aeroplanes and limousines. We went into the arenas overnight.”

Is it true that Island Records, who signed the new group, wanted to call you the Heavy Metal Kids?

Yes. Alexis told us he used to have a band called Free At Last, so we liked the idea of ‘Free’. Then before we signed to Island Records, they said they wanted to call us the Heavy Metal Kids. I said: “No effing way we’re gonna do that,” even if it means losing the record deal. Andy wrote the names down and put them side by side on the mantelpiece, to see which looked best. We all looked at each other and went: “It’s got to be ‘Free’ hasn’t it?”

Free didn’t stop during those early years, but you released two albums, *Tons Of Sobs* and *Free*, within seven months of each other in 1969.

You know, I wasn’t even conscious of doing two albums in a year. Is that what we did? That title, *Tons Of Sobs*, was [producer] Guy Stevens’s idea. Guy was a wonderful lunatic. We did the album while we were touring: play four or five gigs, and stop and

work on the album for a couple of days. But the studio was so busy you’d have another band sat outside and the conga player tapping on the glass, waiting to come in.

Free’s single *All Right Now* reached Number Two in the UK in May 1970, and is still played regularly on the radio today. But Andy Fraser said he never liked Island boss/producer Chris Blackwell’s single edit of the track. How did you feel about it?

I was going with the flow. I didn’t mind cutting it down, because we wanted to accommodate radio and TV, as long as it didn’t upset the integrity of the song. But we insisted on keeping the longer version on the album. I do remember *Top Of The Pops* sending a team to the studio, though, because when I sang: ‘Let’s move before they raise the parking rate’, they were convinced I really sang: ‘Let’s move before they raise the effing rate’ [laughs]. The engineers had to pull all the tracks down so it was just the vocal to convince them.

After *All Right Now* and hit third album *Fire And Water*, Free’s audience changed. How did you feel about not being an underground blues band any more?

Our audiences were always great. But, to be honest, this started the downward spiral. We’d been striving for success – like all bands – and suddenly we had it and... it kind of wasn’t so great. It was nice being an underground band, under the radar. I think I quite liked that.

Free broke up in May 1971, but reunited in January 1972. What was going through your mind at that time?

I didn’t want us to become a pop band. That’s what the record company wanted us to be. Free had toured America with Blind Faith, and it was really tough because we were so insignificant and we got kicked around. We suffered a lot because we didn’t have the correct management. I told everyone I didn’t want to go back to America again until we had the right management and we were ready. But they booked America anyway, and that’s when I split. At the time, I thought that was it – it was over.

It’s been said that Paul Kossoff took the break-up badly. Is that true?

He did, and I feel kind of responsible because he



Bad Company: (clockwise from top) Paul Rodgers, Boz Burrell, Simon Kirke, Mick Ralphs.



deteriorated very sharply after Free split. I started another group called Peace, singing and playing guitar with a drummer called Mick Underwood and a bass player called Stewart MacDonald. We toured with Mott The Hoople, which is where I met [future Bad Company guitarist] Mick Ralphs, and the rest is history.

Was this when you and Ralphs had the idea for Bad Company?

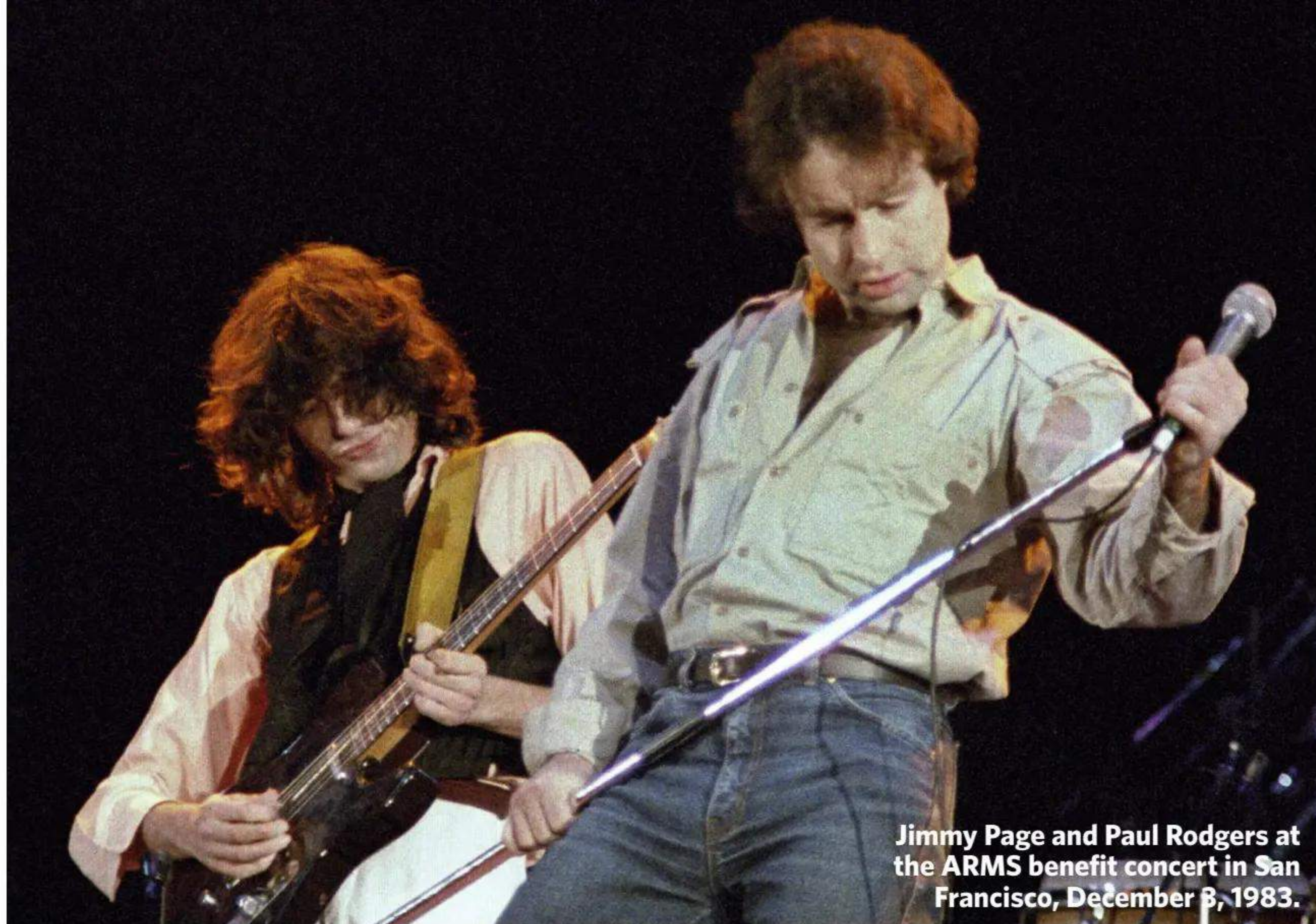
Yes. Before the gigs, Mick and I would gravitate towards each other and go into the tuning room with all the amps and guitars. I had the song *Rock Steady*, and Mick had *Ready For Love* and *Can't Get Enough Of Your Love*. I thought *Ready For Love* had everything – the lyrics, the chorus, the storyline... He'd already done it with Mott The Hoople, but I said it doesn't matter, let's do it again.

But before then, Free reunited and had the Top Ten hit *Wishing Well*. So it wasn't over yet.

We had success with *Wishing Well*, but at that point Koss was hit hard. He was doing drugs in the studio and falling asleep in the middle of playing a solo. Man, we couldn't be dealing with that. We tried, we really tried. I remember playing a show in Newcastle, and he went to his amp and couldn't find the switch. I thought: "Oh gosh, what's he taken?" The fans were saying: "Come on, Koss, you can do it." But it was a real struggle. In the end I thought: "I've got to get out of this," and I did. ➤



Rodgers in Bad Co mode, May 1975.



Jimmy Page and Paul Rodgers at the ARMS benefit concert in San Francisco, December 3, 1983.



After some years away, Rodgers reunited with Bad Company in 1998, but the reunion was short-lived.

What did you have in mind for Bad Company?

Mick Ralphs came down to my cottage in the country, and I thought we were going to get a band together and he thought we were going to be a duo like the Everly Brothers [laughs]. It's funny how bands can get together and not understand each other.

Were Simon Kirke and (ex-King Crimson vocalist/bassist) Boz Burrell already involved?

I didn't take Kirke with me from Free. Then he called the cottage and asked if he could come down, because we didn't have a drummer. That worked out well. We wanted Alan Spenner to play bass because we'd seen him with Joe Cocker in the film from *Woodstock*. Alan was amazing, but turned up three days late, just wandered into the pub. We said: "Oh, we'd given up on you." He goes: "Oh, I want it." We said: "Oh, I don't think so." Which is a shame.

I'd heard you weren't sure about Boz Burrell.

Mick loved Boz, but I was kind of on the fence about Boz, even years later. But when we did the

song *Bad Company*, he played lead bass – and you need a bass player who'll play a bit of lead too. My thing after Free was having a band that was really sharp and together and got it going on.

How did Bad Company come to be managed by Led Zeppelin's manager, Peter Grant?

Clive Coulson [who became Bad Co's tour and day-to-day manager] worked with Free before joining the Zeppelin team. Clive said: "Call Peter Grant, he's interested." Peter used to call Clive [pinches nose and makes a nasal Peter Grant voice] 'Clivey'. But Peter was great. Everything was five stars, and everything was taken care of. We were spoiled rotten, to tell you the truth.

In 1974, Bad Company made their US debut opening for the Edgar Winter Group, acting like bigger stars than the headliners, flying between states in a private jet and arriving at gigs in limousines.

Oh yes [laughs]. We were catapulted into America, and Peter Grant put us right where Led Zeppelin were in terms of aeroplanes and limousines. We went into the arenas overnight.



So you were able to do with Bad Company what you hadn't been with Free in America.

America has always been accepting of the evolution of things – bands, companies, people. They were very accepting of Bad Company because we had the goods. But I knew what we needed in America too, because I'd watched Blind Faith from the side of the stage and seen Ginger Baker throwing his drumstick at the back of a policeman's head, then pick up another and carry on [laughs]. Peter and Led Zeppelin had it all down – the American scene and all the business involved – and we benefited from that.

Bad Company's first three albums – *Bad Company*, *Straight Shooter* and *Run With The Pack* – were huge hits in the UK and the US. But did you ever worry about being in Zeppelin's shadow?

No. Honestly, I had no problem with being on [Zeppelin's vanity label] Swan Song. I thought it was absolutely the bee's knees. I used to go into the Swan Song office from time to time, down on the King's Road opposite the World's End pub, and I'd bump into Jimmy [Page] and Robert [Plant].

"I haven't listened to The Firm for a while. But I think some good things came out of it."

At the time, you and Robert Plant had that swaggering rock-god frontman thing off pat.

Ha ha. He had more swagger. Robert was a good lad. Zeppelin were total gods. They were so big it was astronomical, but they were very down-to-earth and good to us.

Robert Plant wiggled his arse more than you, but you're being very modest here.

Well, thank you, it's nice of you to say. I just copied people like Otis Redding, Ray Charles – I loved Ray Charles's *Crying Time* – Wilson Pickett, Stevie Marriot and Rod Stewart. Actually, Rod Stewart with the Jeff Beck Group doing *Rock My Plimsoul* on the *Truth* album

After such a positive start, where did it begin going wrong with Bad Company?

For the fourth album, *Burnin' Sky* [1977], we came straight off a tour, where we'd been playing the hits, and were booked into a studio. We weren't ready, we didn't have the songs. Me and Mick decided that if we didn't make a good enough album we wouldn't even release it.

What happened?

We were recording in France [at Château d'Hérouville studios, aka the 'Honky Chateau']. We'd work during the week but take the weekend off, and I'd go to Paris and stay in a hotel. I thought if we're making all this money I'm going to stay somewhere nice, because the studio was a bit rough. I just had the chorus for the title track – 'The sky is burnin', I believe my soul's on fire' – but I wrote the verses and chords one weekend and came back to the studio and said: "Okay, I've got one." They put the red light on, and I had no lyrics



Rodgers and Mick Ralphs
with Bad Company in
Manchester in 2010.

at all, and just made it up on the spot. But it turned out to be a good song.

Did you seriously consider not releasing the album?

No, that went by the by. The record company and the management wouldn't let us not release it. But our energy was not what it should be. The wheels were turning and we just pressed on. We *always* pressed on.

And you're wearing your karate gear on the LP cover?

Actually, it's a happi [a traditional Japanese coat], like a dressing gown. I just liked the look of it. But Peter Grant did not like it at all. It was different, I suppose.

But you were practising martial arts at this time.

I certainly was. I did wadō-ryū [a style of karate], which means the way of peace. Suzuki Sensei was a wonderful guy and I learned a lot from him.

You also boxed. Is it true that you sparred with future super-featherweight world champion Cornelius Boza-Edwards?

Yes – and [British boxing champion] John Conteh. I used to drive over to a gym in East London. It belonged to our security guy's dad. All I remember about the sparring is a blizzard of fisticuffs. Those guys are so fast, you don't even see it. You'd think: "I'm going to run away now because there's no way I can get through that."

It's the 1970s, the music business was awash with booze and cocaine, so was wadō-ryū your healthy alternative?

Yes. And I did all the above. Lots of cocaine, lots of booze, just lots of everything. Suzuki Sensei gave me a sense of discipline and I stopped taking cocaine. That's why I am still alive today. I think *Burnin' Sky* was the last time I did cocaine. But I used to have nightmares afterwards where I dreamed I'd taken some again.

That lifestyle change must have taken some discipline to maintain on tour.

“Suzuki Sensei gave me a sense of discipline and I stopped taking cocaine. That's why I am still alive today.”

Yes. I took one of my karate teachers out on the road with me. We used to clear the furniture out of the hotel room so we'd have space. I never got very good at it, but I learned discipline, meditation and the importance of stretching.

Did your abstinence drive a wedge between you and the rest of Bad Company?

Yes. That was the beginning of the end, really, because they were still doing it. I don't know if I'm talking out of turn here... But I used to say to them: "I'm not concerned with what you do. I'm only concerned with what I do. My peace of mind is my business, your peace of mind is yours. It's

fine with me." But they were sneaking around doing it. I'd say: "Guys, you don't have to sneak around." But it did separate us.

Bad Company's next album, *Desolation Angels*, was bigger than *Burnin' Sky*, but punk had happened in the UK. Were you aware that the music was changing?

Yes. At that point we became dinosaurs in many people's eyes, and we did not like that at all. I remember a review of [Bad Co's 1979 single] *Rock'N'Roll Fantasy* that began: "The coffin opens... and out comes this music." I was like: "Oh my god." But I still do *Rock'N'Roll Fantasy* with my band even today.

You parted ways with Bad Company after 1982's *Rough Diamonds* and made a solo album, *Cut Loose*. What were you hoping for at the time?

I stepped back from touring with Bad Company because it was getting too much. When John Bonham died [in September 1980], I thought something's going to give with us too. People were dying, and dying so young from overdoing it. So I decided to make a record in the studio at my house on my own but not to go on the road.

Jimmy Page says that when you and he formed *The Firm* in 1984 you never intended to make more than two albums together.

That's right. What happened though is Jimmy came round and said: "What are you up to?" I played him some things. So we started to write >



A kind of magic: Queen + Paul Rodgers in 2005.

JOERG KOCH/DDP / CAMERA PRESS

songs together. But once you start writing songs together, that's the nucleus of a band.

What do you think of those albums, *The Firm* (1985) and *Mean Business* (1986), now?

[Long pause] I haven't listened to *The Firm* for a while, but I think some good things came out of it – *Midnight Moonlight*, *Radioactive*, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, which I played for a long time with my solo band.

You revived your solo career in the 1990s, one of the albums you made was the Grammy-nominated *Muddy Waters Blues* tribute record, you toured again with *Bad Company*... and then in 2005 you surprised everyone by joining up with Queen.

It was a very interesting experience [laughs]. *Bad Company* and Queen were like separate entities in the seventies. I thought there was no connection whatsoever. Then when we played together and did *We Will Rock You*, *We Are The Champions* and *All Right Now*, I realised there was a connection. It was all classic rock.

Before you played the first Queen + Paul Rodgers shows, you told one interviewer that you would not be wearing tights on stage, à la Freddie Mercury. Ha. And I didn't!

Queen + Paul Rodgers toured the world, played arenas and

even made an album (2008's *The Cosmos Rocks*). How do you look back on that collaboration now?

It was a good time. But to start with, Brian [May] and Roger [Taylor] wanted to do a lot more Free and *Bad Company* songs because they were big fans. I said: "Look, the world has been waiting to hear you and your songs, so let's keep it Queen-heavy." So we only did a couple of mine: *All Right Now*, *Feel Like Makin' Love* and *Bad Company* – and when Queen do *Bad Company* they know how to put on a show.

“I had a lot of respect for Freddie [Mercury], but when I left I had even more because I now know what he went through.”

In what way?

We used to do *Bad Company* with a lot of smoke and lights and me at a piano coming up on a riser from under the stage – all very dramatic. One night I was playing away, and realised the piano hadn't reached the top of the stage. Instead, Brian had fallen down the pit and landed on top of the piano, but like a trooper, with his guitar neck unbroken and still in tune. The roadies jumped into the pit and dragged Brian out. I'm sat there thinking, "What the fuck do I do now?"

What do you make of Adam Lambert?

I haven't checked him out too much, but from what I've seen I think he's a good match. I think he's what they need. When I became a part of Queen I had a lot of respect for Freddie, but when I left I had even more, because I now know what he went through.

Boz Burrell died in 2006, and Mick Ralphs suffered a life-changing stroke in 2016. Are you still in touch with Mick?

We try and look after Mick from a distance across the Atlantic. We do what we can. I love Mick, he's a beautiful guy.

Could you see yourself going out on tour again?

There are no plans. I've sort of retired from touring. And I didn't mind being locked down, because it gave me the opportunity to sleep in my own bed. Three things I don't like about touring:

not sleeping, not getting enough pure oxygen, because there's no air in the hotel room or the plane, and the lack of nutrition, because you've got to take what you can get, like a pizza at four o'clock in the morning. Now, at last, I've got peace [laughs].

This seems to be a theme in your life and music now.

There's a song on the new album, *Living It Up*, and it's a long story told in three minutes about me being at home and searching for three things: my love of blues, soul and, of course, rock'n'roll, a "thank you" to the countries that gave me all that, and to find some peace of mind. 🎸

Paul Rodgers' Midnight Rose album is available now via Sun Records.





The Soundtrack Of My Life

Ex-Moody Blues frontman **Justin Hayward** on the records, artists and gigs that are of lasting significance to him.

Interview: **Rob Hughes**



MARTA SZCZESNIAK/PRESS: NINA SIMONE: GETTY

“The emotion in Nina Simone’s voice was just tremendous.”

It’s nearly 60 years since the teenage Justin Hayward became Marty Wilde’s guitarist, after which he established himself as singer, guitar player and focal point of the Moody Blues, writing enduring classics such as *Nights In White Satin*, *Tuesday Afternoon*, *Question* and *The Voice*. The Moodies may be no more, but the evergreen Hayward’s solo career continues to flourish. Ahead of his forthcoming *Blue World* tour of the UK, he tells *Classic Rock* about his musical passions.

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

I come from a family with quite strong faith, so I’d always go to church every Sunday. Most of it was boring, but I really liked singing from *Hymns Ancient And Modern*. To this day I can still go to church and have that same feeling. Then Johnnie Ray was the first pop singer that I liked: *Cry* and *Just Walkin’ In The Rain*.

THE FIRST SONG I PERFORMED LIVE

I have an acetate of the first band that I was in, The Woodpeckers, during my first year at high school in Swindon. We played The Coasters’ *Charlie Brown*.

THE GUITAR HERO

During Van Halen’s *Jump* era, we were playing at the same big music festival in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. I watched Eddie Van Halen and it was like: “How can you do that on a guitar? Where does that *come* from?” You can’t possibly learn that or teach what he did.

THE SINGER

When the Moodies were inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame [in 2018], Nina Simone was posthumously inducted with us. She meant a lot to the group in the early days. I was lucky enough to see her once. The emotion in her voice was just tremendous.

THE SONGWRITER

From *Homeward Bound* onwards, Paul Simon was somebody to aspire to. The way he put lyrical ideas together in such a simple way, with just an acoustic guitar. When I first saw Simon and Garfunkel at the Albert Hall in the late sixties, I’d assumed he was the lead voice, because he was the writer. But then I realised Art was singing lead and Paul did all those amazing little harmonies.

THE CULT HERO

In the sixties there were lots of people who you thought were bound to make it, but it just didn’t happen for them somehow. [Guitarist] Roy Buchanan was very special. His playing just really turned me on.

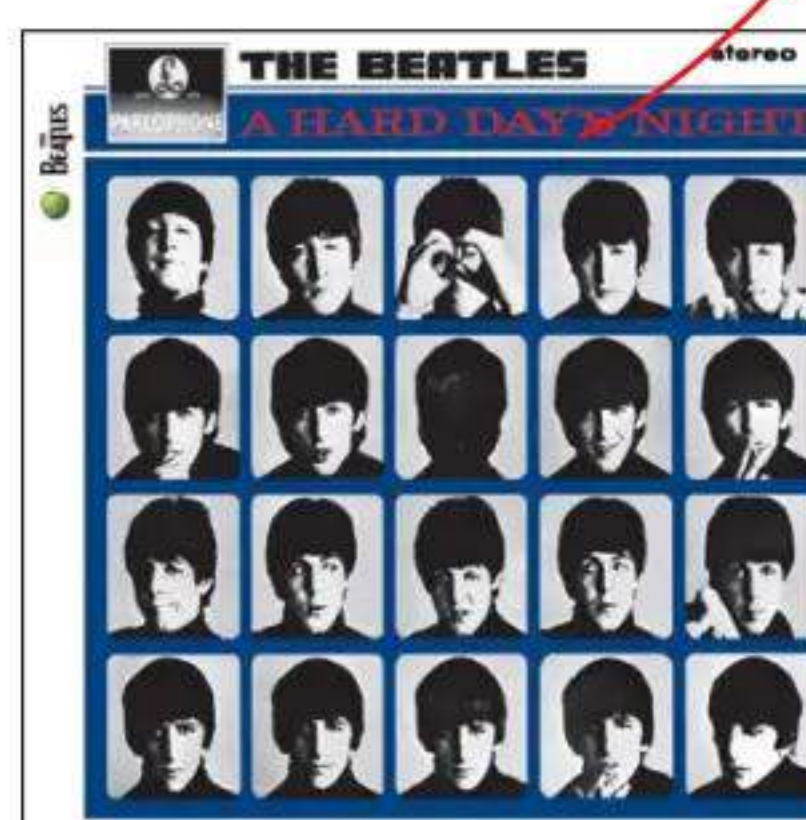
THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

The Beatles were so important to me. I remember hearing *Love Me Do* for the first time and thinking

life is going to be totally different from now on. When it came to *A Hard Day’s Night*, every song was a winner. I know they made it quickly, and the songs are only two-and-a-half minutes long, but that album always resonates with me. They opened the door for everyone.

MY FAVOURITE LIVE BAND

The best live band I ever saw was The Who at the Saville Theatre [London]. The sound was superb, especially the balance of guitars between John Entwistle’s bass and Pete’s SG. And of course it was so loud. There was nobody to beat them.



THE BEST RECORD I MADE

There’s two Moodies albums, actually: *Days Of Future Passed* [1967] and *The Other Side Of Life* [1986]. The second one put us back on top in America. To go around again in our career, like we did in the US during the eighties, was such a great gift. And I’d kind of missed it in the sixties, because my mind was elsewhere – chemically, mystically and emotionally.

THE WORST RECORD I MADE

Before the Moodies, I did a couple of things on [label] Pye that weren’t the greatest thing. There’s also *The Present* [1983], where we’d take for ever to do one song. We’d gone into that kind of universe. It was a terrible temptation to just turn up, play football in the studio and make one song every few weeks.

MY GUILTY PLEASURE

I love really beautifully crafted pop records – Stock Aitken Waterman, the Spice Girls and the boy bands. Should I be guilty about loving all of those things? I just love music.

MY SATURDAY NIGHT/ PARTY SONG

If I’m sitting down and hear *September* by Earth Wind & Fire, I have to get up. It’s one of those records that, before you know it, you’re jigging around the room to. I always loved Maurice White’s voice and groove, and the band’s message of

universal harmony.

MY ‘IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE’ SONG

I was privileged to know Danny Williams when I was playing with Marty Wilde. Danny did the English version of *Moon River* [1961], and those three minutes taught me how to sing – or at least how I *wanted* to sing. I’d recommend everyone listen to it.

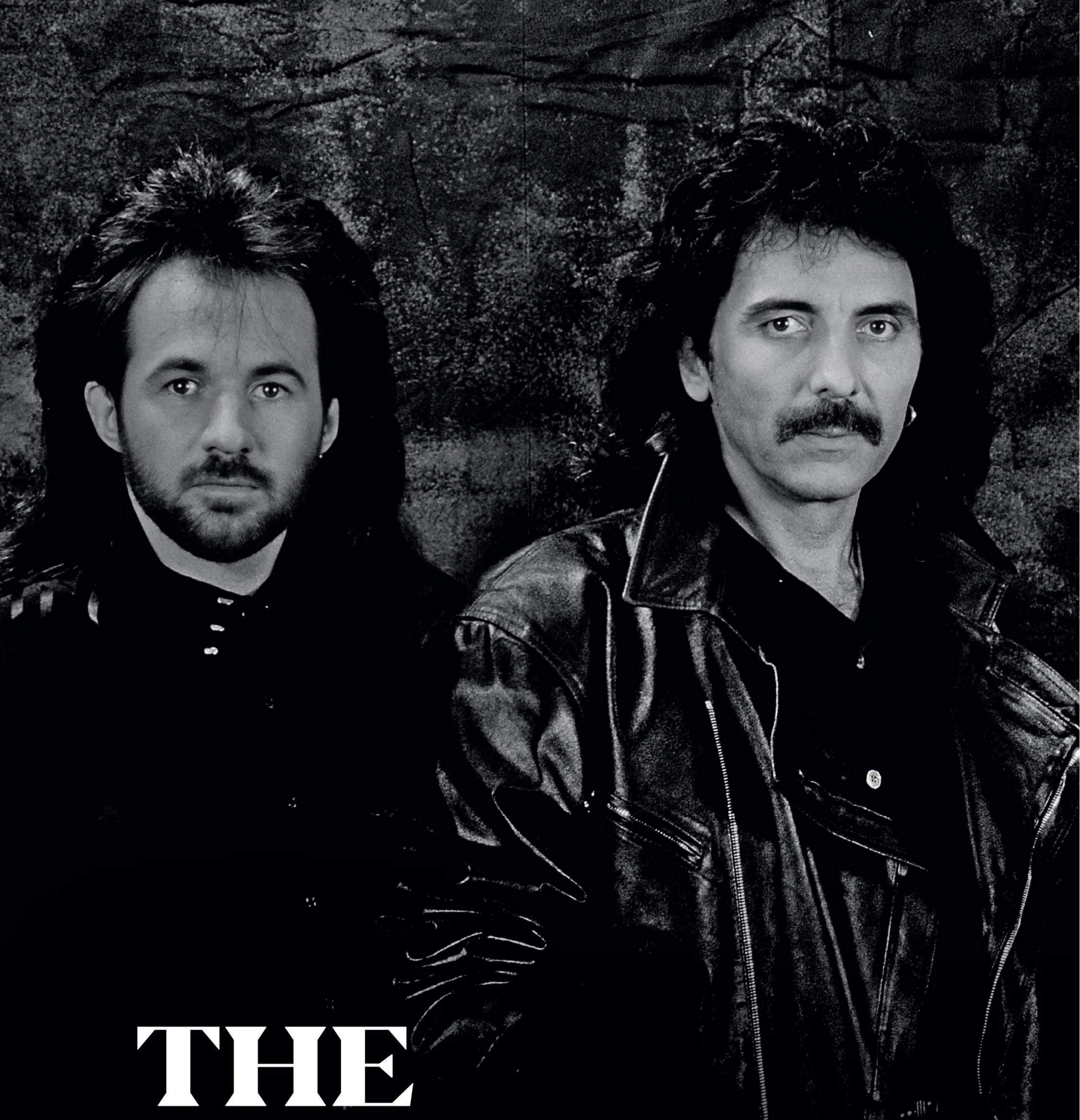
THE SONG THAT MAKES ME CRY

I wouldn’t say it makes me cry, but Christopher Cross’s *Sailing* always stops me in my tracks.

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

There’s several recordings of Richard Strauss’s *Four Last Songs*. One is by Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, with the Berlin Symphony Orchestra [1966], and that gets me every time. The fourth song is called *At Gloaming*. It’s just so beautiful. 🎧

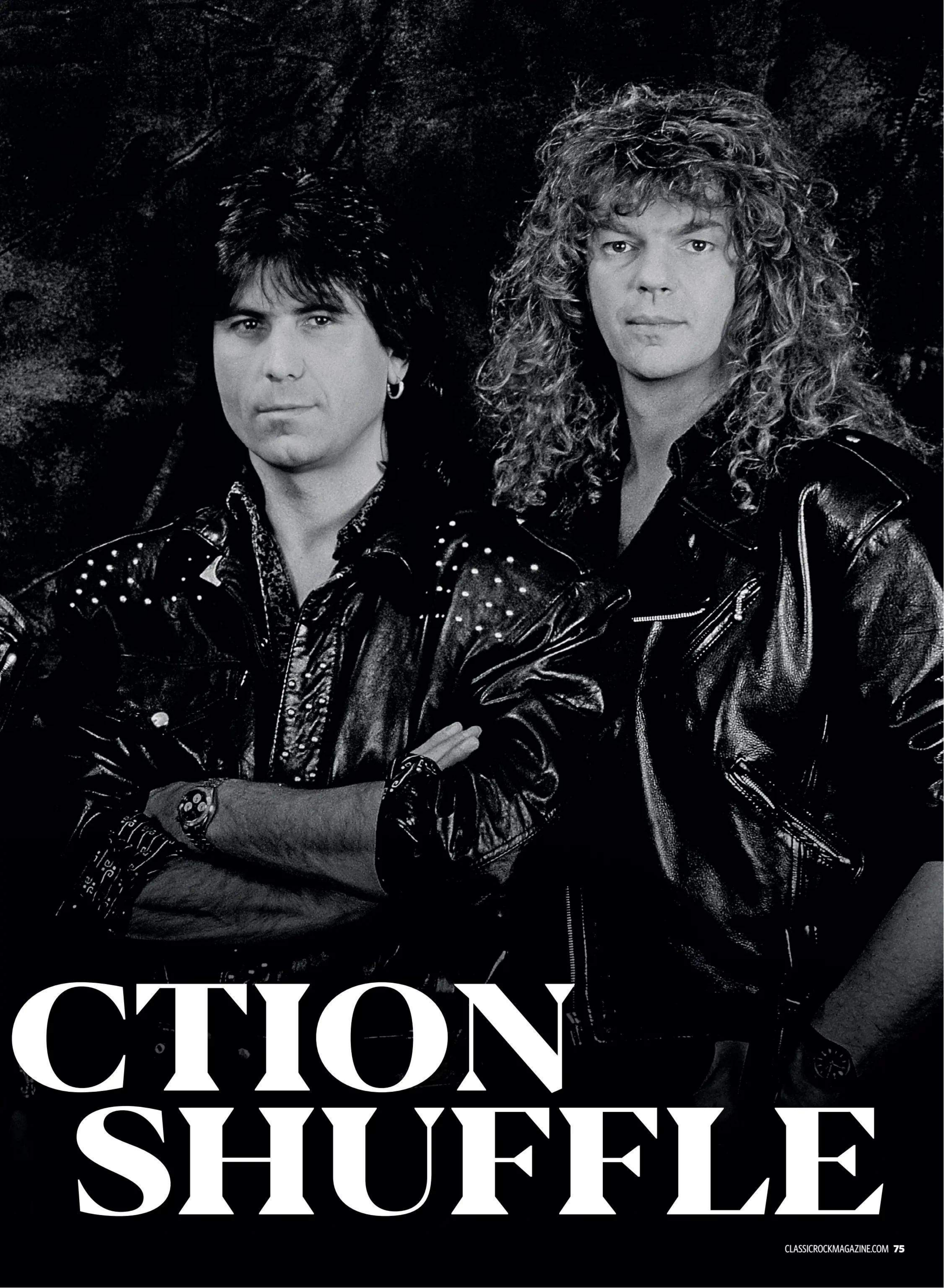
For the latest info, visit justinhayward.com



THE RESURRE

Dio was out, Gillan was gone, Geezer had given up. And Ozzy? Ozzy had declared war... Into the blackness surrounding **Black Sabbath** came light in the shape of singer Tony Martin, and the next chapter in the band's ever eventful story began.

Words: **Dave Ling**



CTION SHUFFLE

BLACK SABBATH



"I wanna see your... money!" Ozzy Osbourne and Tony Iommi with Black Sabbath at the Live Aid concert in Philadelphia, July 13, 1985.



Olé! Sabbath in Spain in '83 on the *Born Again* tour: (l-r) Tony Iommi, Bev Bevan, Ian Gillan, Geezer Butler.



The *Seventh Star* ('86) Sabbath line-up: (l-r) Dave Spitz, Glenn Hughes, Tony Iommi, Eric Singer, Geoff Nicholls.

In the autumn of 1987, Tony Martin received a phone call from his manager, inviting him to take a drive around the pair's native Birmingham. At the time, Martin was the frontman with a local band called The Alliance. They had recorded a session for BBC Radio's *The Friday Rock Show* and, thanks to a development deal with Warner Brothers Records, recorded an impressive demo tape that was generating a little below-the-radar attention.

Martin's manager, Albert Chapman, was the owner of The Elbow Room, a rough-and-tumble nightspot on the city's Aston High Street. Chapman had been a schoolmate of some of the members of Black Sabbath, and took on the role as their tour manager during the band's rise to international success during the mid-70s. Consequently, Chapman knew almost everybody on the rock scene, especially in the Midlands. On the afternoon concerned, when Martin enquired about their destination, Chapman remained evasive.

"So, we pull up at this house, Albert knocks on the front door," Martin says now, "and when it opens, fuck me, there stands Tony Iommi."

Backtracking just a little, Chapman had put forward the name of his young charge a couple of years earlier, at a time when Sabbath were having issues with their latest frontman, former Trapeze and Deep Purple bassist/vocalist Glenn Hughes.

"I don't know what those issues were," Martin insists. "All I remember is that when Albert said: 'I've put you up for that job. Are you interested?' I replied: 'Whaaat?!' I couldn't sing like Glenn Hughes – nobody can. But they [Sabbath] put me on standby. And it scared me to death. In the end the issues with Glenn were sorted out and they released the album *Seventh Star*."

"I thought nothing more about it, but later on

give it a go.' And that was my introduction to being in Black Sabbath."

Having signed on the dotted line, Tony Martin became enshrined as a member of one of the most important hard rock and heavy metal bands of them all. Unfortunately, however, in spite of all his efforts Martin was not destined to receive all that he signed up for. Over the next decade the singer would experience all that life in a once

iconic but now ailing band could throw at him, including five albums, two sackings and multiple world tours. Martin went on to become Black Sabbath's second-longest-serving lead singer, after Ozzy Osbourne, but his tenure brought its share of uncertainty, frustration, and heartbreak.

Within minutes of talking to the gregarious, straight-talking and likable Martin it becomes apparent that he really doesn't give a shit about negativity. Not any more, anyway. His time fronting Sabbath was about seizing an unexpected opportunity. A chance to be creative, in defiance of what seemed like pretty insurmountable odds.

Which is exactly what happened. Incredibly, the new-look band went on to create some of the best albums in Sabbath's sizeable catalogue (which have now been retooled as the four-disc set *Anno Domini 1989-1995*).

By the late 80s, Black Sabbath had descended into a shit-show. Ronnie James Dio quitting to form his own band began the slippery slope. Former Deep Purple singer Ian Gillan sang on the love-or-loathe *Born Again* album, and fronted the band on a tour that inspired *Spinal Tap*, with its outsized Stonehenge

"I really love the stuff we did back then with Tony Martin and Cozy [Powell], but it was a frustrating time."

Tony Iommi

Albert called back and asked: 'Do you want to have a go with the guys?' I thought: 'Fucking hell, this is a bit mad'. But he was serious."

On the day in question, despite the previous conversations, Martin had zero knowledge of who he was about to meet. "It had all been a bit cloak-and-dagger," he says, smiling. Chapman and Martin were invited in for a chat, and before too long the singer attended an audition in London.

"I was asked to sing *The Shining*, which became the opening song on *The Eternal Idol*," he recalls, "and right away I was told: 'You've got the job.' But before it soaked in they added: 'The album has got to be finished in seven days.'" My response was: 'Okay, I'll



Dave Spitz and Ray Gillen with Sabbath at Hammersmith Odeon, London, June '86, on the *Seventh Star* tour.



stage prop, and had ELO's Bev Bevan on drums. Factor in Gillan's reluctance to learn the lyrics, and a disastrous sleeve design of a baby with claws and horns, not to mention the imminent reunion of Purple's Mk II line-up, and Sabbath now resembled the proverbial house of cards awaiting a stray gust of wind.

Martin had entered the frame because American singer Ray Gillen, a replacement for Hughes during a US tour for *Seventh Star* that was abandoned due to poor ticket sales, had walked out during the recording of Sabbath's next album, *The Eternal Idol*, to join guitarist John Sykes in Blue Murder.

Depending on whether or not you include former male model David Donato (whose appointment was announced and then rapidly cancelled after he had told the press: "I always had a [mental] picture of what the right singer in Sabbath should be – and it was me"), Jeff Fenolt of Christian rockers Joshua (rumoured to have been hired and fired just as speedily) and co-founder Ozzy Osbourne (who returned for a disastrous, drunk showing at Live Aid in Philadelphia), Martin was either the third, fourth or fifth lead singer in Black Sabbath since Ian Gillan waved goodbye in March 1984.

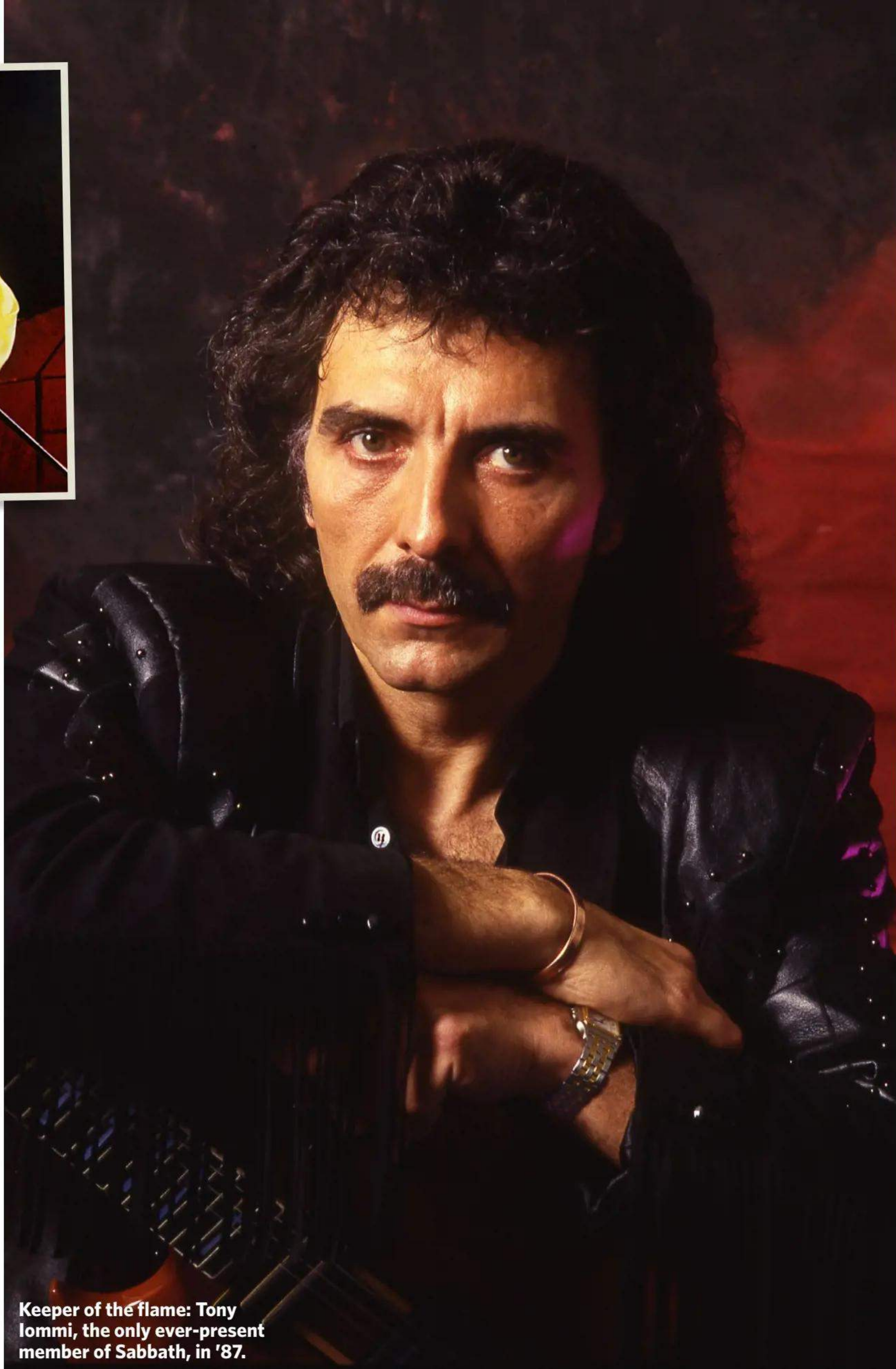
When asked to sum up the aforementioned half-decade in the history of Black Sabbath, Tony Iommi, the last man standing from the classic era, is momentarily lost for words.

"It was chaos," he eventually replies, laughing. "Just chaos. When somebody left, fine, you bring somebody else in. And when they go, you do the same thing. After a while it gets pretty tedious, but what's the alternative?"

Sabbath concluded their more than five-decade-long career with a sold-out world tour, ending in Birmingham in February 2017, and the band were inducted to the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 2006. It's strange to think of them as an underdog, but by the mid-80s that's what the group had become. And yet, amid the chaos around him, Iommi managed to lead the band towards the creation of some albums that fans still rank among their finest.

"I really love the stuff we did back then with Tony Martin and Cozy [Powell], but it was a frustrating time," Iommi states. "People had to really try to accept what we were doing. And although it was a great band and we had some really good music, those albums didn't really catch on. As the man running [the band], I found that difficult."

In his autobiography *Iron Man*, Iommi reveals how a previous manager had left the band with huge tax problems. A decaying relationship with Sabbath's long-time label Vertigo was another ➤



Keeper of the flame: Tony Iommi, the only ever-present member of Sabbath, in '87.



None less Black: the short-lived line-up of (l-r) Terry Chimes, Geoff Nicholls, Tony Martin, Tony Iommi and Jo Burt in 1987.



You've been framed: Tony Martin on the video shoot for *Headless Cross*, February 1989.



Tony Iommi and Brian May recording at Metropolis Studios, London, for Rock Aid Armenia, the Armenian earthquake appeal, July 8, 1989.

cause for near-perpetual sense of firefighting.

"Ever since I've been in this business it's been like that," Iommi says. "There were problems pretty much since day one. You just have to believe in yourself and try to see beyond those situations. Had I not done so, then I'd have packed up long ago."

Did he come close to packing it in?

"No. As I say, there were always awful things to contend with, life is like that," he shrugs. "It's the thought of keeping things going and getting to the next level that drives you on. You give in or fight through it, and I wouldn't give in. That's part of my character, one way or another I always want to carry on."

As much as joining Sabbath represented a great opportunity for Tony Martin, looking in from the outside it was obvious that the band were in a constant state of chaos, and yet the singer insists that there was no trepidation.

"None at all – I didn't have time to think!" he says, grinning. "I knew they didn't have any money, Albert had warned me, so I went in and did what needed to be done."

Martin provided Iommi with the stability he needed. With Ray Gillen's voice wiped from the tapes, the newcomer soon proved his worth.

"Albert Chapman was my best friend, we'd been at school together, and he was managing The Alliance," Iommi recalls of the introduction to his new lead vocalist. "We had reached a point with Ray Gillen where there was a problem, and Albert reminded me about Tony. He was great. The guy could really sing, and once he was on board things grew from there."

Although later on he would supply lyrics, this time, with songs already written, Martin was relieved to ease himself in gently by simply singing what he had been told. When it came to live shows for *The Eternal Idol*, Iommi remembers that Martin was thrown in at the deep end.

"It was a huge responsibility for Tony," he acknowledges. "He was so green. Following Ronnie and Ozzy, and Gillan really, was a bloody hard challenge – especially in front of a Sabbath crowd. It was difficult for Tony, and I expected him to come up to the mark. Because I was so busy thinking about pushing forward, I didn't really consider the fact that he was now in a totally different world. But he stuck with it, and he got much better."

Martin's first gig with the band was in the Greek capital Athens. "My debut was supposed to be a festival in Bristol,

but nobody turned up and the promoter went bust," he recalls.

Being on stage with Sabbath was far from a fun experience for Martin. "Mate, just assume that throughout my entire career with Sabbath I was shit-scared," he says with a smile. "It never let up. Those guys already had twenty-five years of experience. As much as I learned, I was never going to catch them up."

Iommi doesn't recall whether or not he put an arm around Martin's shoulder in a fatherly way to reassure the newcomer that things would be fine.

"I hope I did," he ponders optimistically. "But you're going back thirty-odd years."

"Actually, Tony didn't do that at all," Martin says, laughing, although without a trace of animosity. "I was left standing alone in the dark, trying to match up to these iconic singers that had gone before. I had no idea what I was doing, though I knew my voice was alright."

"They would say with the next album we're going to do this or that, and I'd reply: 'What? I'm going to do another one?' So I guess they must have liked what I was doing."

Another cause for uncertainty in Martin's mind was the never-ending speculation that he was going to be replaced by a returning Ozzy or Dio: "I was having to constantly read between the lines to find my position in the band. It was a perpetual learning curve."

Sabbath had two managers, who often didn't talk to one another. Things were so shambolic that for the shooting of a video for *The Shining*, Terry Chimes of The Clash guested on drums, and





Another day, another Sabbath: (l-r) Tony Iommi, Cozy Powell, Tony Martin and Neil Murray, September 1989.

the band roped in a now forgotten guitarist they'd never even met to mime the bass parts.

The Eternal Idol reached No.66 in the UK, and in the US stalled at No.168.

Artistically speaking, *Idol* represented a step up from unbalanced predecessor *Seventh Star*, which Iommi had sought to release as a solo album, but commercially the stats were massively disappointing. Almost two decades after Sabbath's self-titled debut, their label Vertigo dropped the band.

Undeterred, Iommi signed a new four-album deal to join an eclectic roster of the independent label I.R.S., run by Miles Copeland. One of the industry's true mavericks, Copeland was also the manager of The Police (and brother of their drummer Stewart), having learned his craft through looking after Wishbone Ash.

"Miles is an interesting person, very noisy and loud," Iommi says, laughing. "What I liked was that he told me: 'You know what to do... just do it and the rest is up to me.' We had artistic freedom. We didn't need millions of quid, just somebody to get behind us."

It speaks volumes of the complicated nature of this era in Black Sabbath's history that all five of their albums with Martin cannot be neatly tied up with a bow and presented as one. As the band's swan song for Vertigo (Warner Brothers in the US), *The Eternal Idol* is not a part of the new boxed set.

For the next album, Iommi put together what he hoped would be a more solid line-up of himself, Martin, faithful keyboard player Geoff Nicholls, drummer Cozy Powell and bassist Laurence Cottle. Iommi had wanted to work with Powell for many years, and after leaving Gary Moore's band the former Rainbow, Whitesnake and Michael Schenker Group the drummer happened to be a free agent.

"Getting somebody credible like Cozy was a great boost," Iommi says enthusiastically. "This was somebody who had seen everything and been

"I wasn't overly familiar with Neil, but once I heard him play, that was it – we were off!" Iommi exclaims. Given Murray's background, which included a stint with prog-jazz-rockers Colosseum II, he was perhaps not an obvious choice, and Murray says that while he was comfortable in the role, covering "the complicated bits and pieces" played by Cottle on *Headless Cross* and also remaining faithful to Geezer Butler's playing on the earlier Sabbath material was "a bit of a juggling act".

There was also the matter of the dark subject matter of Sabbath's songs. "Certain lyrics didn't really appeal to me," Murray says with a chuckle. "But the same had also been true of some of mister Coverdale's songs."

With budgets for everything, including producers, now under scrutiny, the 'new' Black Sabbath found themselves staying in far smaller hotels than previously,

although the resulting levels of camaraderie made the quartet a tough, self-sufficient little unit. "Sabbath felt more like it had done in the early days," Iommi reflects. "It was a real band."

As a lyricist, Tony Martin came into his own on 1989's *Headless Cross*. Nothing to do with Satanism, the album's title track took its name from the village in Reddich in which he lived. "It told the tale of a plague in the 1600s," he explains.

Full of high-quality songs including its tense, memorable title track, *Devil And Daughter* and the brooding *When Death Calls*, which featured ➤

“It was difficult to ignore that Sabbath were still seen as Ozzy, Tony, Geezer and Bill. Particularly in America.

Neil Murray

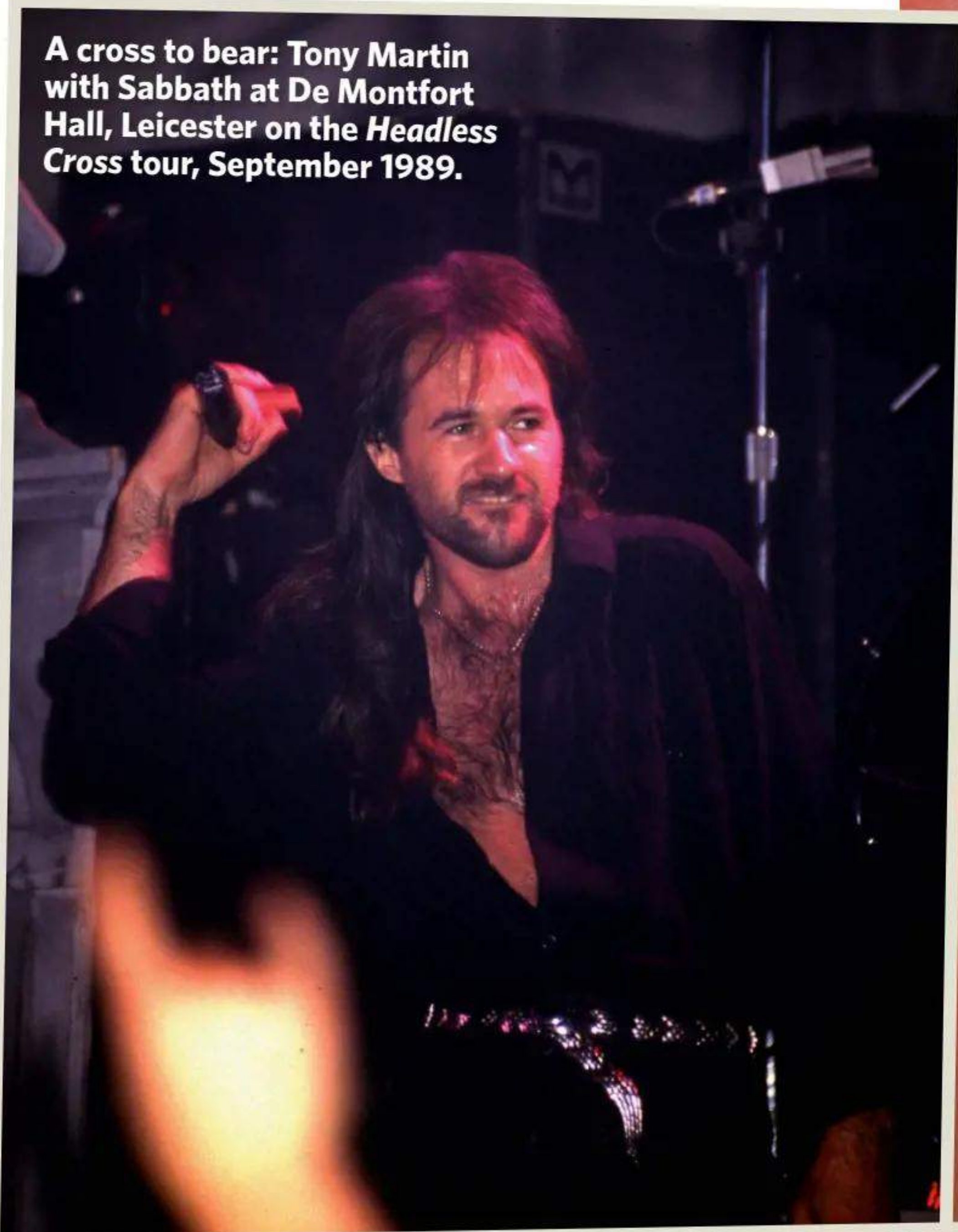
through it all, as I had. When Cozy stayed at my house, we'd be up late half-pissed writing songs on a cassette, and then laying them down the following day."

Although jazz and fusion bassist Cottle played on the session, led by Iommi and Powell, he left once the recording was complete.

With original bassist Geezer Butler on the verge of rejoining, only to change his mind, it was Powell who proposed his former Whitesnake bandmate Neil Murray, fresh out of Japanese hard rockers Vow Wow, to complete the rhythm section.

BLACK SABBATH

A cross to bear: Tony Martin with Sabbath at De Montfort Hall, Leicester on the *Headless Cross* tour, September 1989.



Cozy Powell and Tony Iommi in Hollywood in 1989.



a guest guitar solo from Iommi's good friend Brian May, *Headless Cross* put Black Sabbath back on the map. In Britain it fell just short of the Top 30. In the US, where the band complained bitterly of being unable to find it in the stores when they were on tour there, it narrowly missed making it into *Billboard*'s Hot 100.

"We had started all over again, but *Headless Cross* really boosted us," Iommi says proudly. "People began to respect us once more."

All the same, it's vital to remember the extreme bad blood that simmered at the time between Iommi and Ozzy Osbourne, who since being sacked by the band in 1979 had become a superstar, especially in America. Consequently, when Sabbath began touring the US for *Headless Cross*, the Osbourne set-up used every trick in the book to derail them. "Each night, Sharon put Ozzy in the same cities that we were booked to play," Martin remembers. "They wanted to split the fans, and it worked."

After just eight dates, Sabbath's tour was cancelled due to poor ticket sales. "I can't state for sure that [the ploy] was calculated, but they were

powerful enough. They didn't like the fact that we were touring and it was being sort of successful."

Continuing the excellent work begun with *Headless Cross*, in February 1990 the band began recording the fourteenth Black Sabbath album. Cozy Powell had suggested it should be titled *The Satanic Verses*, in honour of Salman Rushdie's controversial book. For obvious reasons this idea was quickly overruled. *Tyr*, with lyrics based on Norse mythology, was released in the summer of 1990.

"*Headless Cross* was a crash course in English history, so *Tyr* was Viking history," Martin explains. "I had lots of themes in my head, like Samurai warriors. Every culture has its dark side."

"It was hard for Tony," Iommi says, "because Ozzy had done his thing and Ronnie also had his own style. After those two we needed to sing about other things than devils and those areas that Ronnie took us into," he points out, adding with a chuckle: "Death was mentioned a lot."

This time Sabbath *did* make it into the UK Top 30, although in the US *Tyr* failed completely to chart. Nevertheless, Iommi felt quietly confident that momentum was building.

"We had enjoyed making both albums, and we toured, everybody knew what to expect of each other," he recalls. "We were getting things done."

Bassist Neil Murray raises a valid point: "As good as things were musically, it was difficult to ignore that Sabbath were still seen as Ozzy, Tony, Geezer and Bill. No other permutation could exist – particularly in America. In some places that we went, nobody had broken the news that the line-up had changed."

But the 'new' Sabbath fought hard. In an interview of the era, Cozy Powell told *RAW* magazine: "I always believed this band to be far above the rubbish that is written about it. [Before the previous two albums] Black Sabbath's stock with the press couldn't have got any lower. A lot of the fans still believed, but they needed to be convinced. We are getting stick for calling ourselves Black Sabbath, but it's a question of believing in something and maintaining that it's worth keeping."

"The other camp would prefer Black Sabbath to finish, so they can get on with their own careers and make a bit [of money] out of it," Powell continued in a reference to Ozzy Osbourne and co. "But unfortunately for them we're not about to go away and die that easily."

Those comments brought swift rebuke from



All change! The 1992 Sabbath: Vinnie Appice, Geezer Butler, Ronnie James Dio, Tony Iommi.



Rob Halford standing in for Ronnie Dio with Sabbath in 1992 when Dio refused to appear with them at Ozzy's retirement bash.

the Osbourne camp, with Ozzy faxing an extraordinary ‘open letter’ to RAW, sarcastically addressed to ‘Mr Black Sabbath And His Three Droogs’, in which each band member was viciously rebuked one by one.



To Iommi he retorted: “I don’t care what line-up you have, you could have anyone from Dio to Pavarotti and it will never be Sabbath. Don’t belittle that band, Tony, move on.”

Having defended their use of the Sabbath name, Powell was told: “Try pushing that drum stick from your asshole so you can think clearly.”

Addressing Neil Murray, Ozzy warned: “Get ready for your new gig as Geezer Butler’s bass roadie”.

Ozzy claimed to be unable to recall Tony Martin’s name, before concluding: “I would love to say all of this to your faces, pussies, so call me anywhere anytime.”

Reminded of the fracas 34 years later, a milder and more mature Iommi is keen to sweep it under the carpet. “Wow... I don’t remember that,” he replies cautiously. “There was bad blood, but it’s water under the bridge. Ozzy and I have gone through so many things. I played on his last album. Me and Oz are in touch every week. The [positive] way things turned out [between us] is mad, really.”

Despite Powell’s feisty defence of Sabbath’s continuation, following the touring for *Tyr* in 1992 Ronnie Dio was invited to return for what became the *Dehumanizer* album. It had taken two and a half years for Tony Martin to feel like a part of the group, and now, without warning, it was over.

“I was devastated,” he remembers. “This was something I hadn’t expected. I had thought we were doing alright.”

Martin’s sacking affected his mental health. “I just withdrew from music for a couple of years,” he says sadly.

As much as Iommi had fought against the move, Cozy Powell was booted out of the group by Dio. Powell had declined to play with Dio

after the pair’s spell in Rainbow, and now, daggers drawn, the singer held all the cards.

“I remember Cozy going, ‘If that little c**t says anything to me, I’m going to smash him in the face,’” Iommi wrote in his book *Iron Man*.

Following a bizarre accident in 1991 when Powell’s horse collapsed of of heart attack as he exercised it, breaking his hip and putting him out of action, Dio offered the drum stool to Vinny Appice, Sabbath’s drummer on 1981’s *Mob Rules* album. For *Dehumanizer*, bassist Geezer Butler also made a surprise return to the band. He had jammed with Sabbath at a gig at London’s

“I was left standing alone in the dark, trying to match up to these iconic singers that had gone before.”

Tony Martin

Hammersmith Odeon at the end of the *Tyr* tour, and it was Neil Murray who suggested that Butler returning to the line-up would be a good thing.

“I wasn’t wishing I was out of the band, but when Geezer played *Black Sabbath* and *Paranoid* with us, the audience reaction made that very obvious,” reasons Murray, who, along with Cozy Powell (who died in a car crash in 1998), would join Brian May’s solo band. “They wanted two of the four originals instead of one.”

Produced by Mack (of Queen fame), *Dehumanizer* sold well, thanks largely to the inclusion of the song *Time Machine* in the soundtrack to the film *Wayne’s World*.

It took two years for the reunion with Dio to come to an end, but when it did it was in spectacular fashion.

Sabbath had agreed to play two shows in California as a part of Ozzy Osbourne’s retirement, but when Ronnie dug his heels in and refused to appear (“I have more pride than that, I’m not supporting a clown”), Judas Priest frontman Rob Halford stepped in. A reunion of the classic Sabbath line-up appeared to be on the cards, but it didn’t happen. Instead, Iommi and Butler reached out to Tony Martin.

In fact, Martin claims to have been present in the background during the *Dehumanizer* sessions, which were slightly troubled: “Tony had called me up and said: ‘This isn’t going too well with Ronnie. Do you fancy coming along and having a look at what’s happening?’ But in the end they and Ronnie finished the album.”

Although the booklet that comes with the new *Anno Domini 1989–1995* box set insists that Iommi put the Martin-fronted band “on hold” during Dio’s second spell, suggesting the guitarist believed it was destined to reconvene, he laughs at such a suggestion.

“With our band you can never say anything for sure. We broke up, came back together, threw somebody out and got them back in again,” he shrugs. “With Ozzy it happened two or three times, and twice with Ronnie. Black Sabbath band members are in and out like yo-yos. I’ve learned never to write off anything – unless somebody is dead.”

The resulting album, 1994’s *Cross Purposes*, recorded by Iommi, Butler, Martin, Geoff Nicholls and former Rainbow drummer Bobby Rondinelli, is undervalued in Sabbath’s sizeable canon. (Its closing track *Evil Eye* was co-written with Edward Van Halen, but goes uncredited as such due to publishing reasons.)

“I really liked *Cross Purposes*,” Iommi states. “Tony was singing great





Tony Martin (left) and Tony Iommi at the unveiling of the Blue Plaque for Cozy Powell in his home town of Cirencester, Gloucestershire, January 7, 2016.

and the songs were very strong. I didn't know [its co-producer] Leif Mases, but he did an excellent job."

For a short period of time, Bill Ward returned to the line-up (Iommi doesn't recall why Powell didn't return).

"I had told Bill that we were going to South America and he reacted positively, so I asked if he'd like to do those gigs," Iommi says, before saying with a laugh: "Bill asked: 'Great, what shall I do? Meet you there?' 'No, Bill, you must come to England and rehearse the show.' Bill lost track of things and we couldn't do the songs from *Headless Cross* and *Tyr*, so we ended up doing a set of old Sabbath songs. That was a bit awkward."

Although commercially *Cross Purposes* performed more than respectably, charting on both sides of the Atlantic (No.41 in the UK, No.122 in the US), Butler opted to return to Ozzy's solo band. Iommi realised that some stability was necessary: "I said: that's it - I'm getting Neil and Cozy back."

The album Sabbath were about to make was assured of its notoriety when the band's label I.R.S. put forward the name of Ernie Cunningham, better known as Ernie C, the guitar player with rapper Ice T's group Body Count, as its producer. As realisation dawned that the album, which would be titled *Forbidden*, was becoming a car crash, Iommi was powerless to hit the brakes. Decades later, Ice-T's spoken word part on the album's track *The Illusion Of Power* remains a genuine WTF moment.

"*Forbidden* has been a thorn in my side for years," Iommi sighs. "I knew all about Ice-T and that he was good, but I didn't expect him to bring along his guitar player to

produce the album. When a band knows its sound and exactly what it wants, bringing in an outsider is very disruptive. I found myself on the sidelines. Our whole situation had become so frail."

To Iommi's disbelief and dismay, Ernie C took Cozy Powell aside and asked him to play in an unfamiliar manner. "Cozy is Cozy, you can't have somebody telling him to do things differently," Iommi remembers, aghast.

"I know *why* Ice-T and Ernie were brought in. I mean Aerosmith and Run DMC had had their big

"Just assume that throughout my entire career with Sabbath I was shit-scared. It never let up."

Tony Martin

hit [*Walk This Way*]," Martin muses. "But I wasn't even certain I would be on the album, because Ice-T was coming in to 'sing some stuff'. When I asked whether that was one or two tracks, or more, nobody knew. But the work done by Tony has brought the album right up to date. It sounds really Sabbath-y now."

"I found some bits of guitar that Ernie hadn't used [on the original album]," Iommi explains. "Within the obvious constraints, I managed to make things sound a hell of a lot better."

Despite peaking at No.71 in Britain, *Forbidden* dropped off a cliff in the US and remains the least successful Black Sabbath album of them all.

For a musician, going out on the road, playing songs from it for fans and talking to journalists about an

album that they don't believe in is about as bad as it gets, and when reminded, Iommi grimaces.

"*Forbidden* caused a lot of turmoil within the band, but we're professional," he asserts. "But also, at the time we probably didn't see the album quite as we do now. You know, there's some good stuff on *Forbidden*. I wouldn't slate it."

Tony Martin recalls asking several times whether Sabbath's original line-up would be getting back together. Despite assurances to the contrary, that's what happened.

"Like I said earlier, I never write anything off," Iommi states stoically. "When these things happen, they bring problems. Getting back with Ozzy brought problems. You've just got to solve them."

"The second time around, I saw the writing on the wall, and I understood it," Martin says. "Black Sabbath is a major band. You've just got to fit in with that and take the rough with the smooth."

After *Forbidden*, it would be almost two decades of good times and bad, with yet more reunions and sackings, before three of Sabbath's founder members got together with producer Rick Rubin to make *13*, the album that now seems set to be their epitaph (Bill Ward was unfortunately not on it due a contractual dispute). Again without Ward, the band's final gig was, fittingly, in their home city of Birmingham, on February 4, 2017.

Iommi and Martin are thrilled to propel the Sabbath records from the time Martin was with the band, for so long overlooked and neglected, back out into the public glare. It's all so long ago that neither of them owns a complete set.

"Sabbath's Tony Martin era has been pushed right into the background. A lot of people didn't even know there were albums with him," Iommi marvels. "I was often asked whether they would come out again and a new generation of kids can listen to them now, hopefully. I'm also pleased for Tony, because he was messed around a lot [by us] over the years."

"How nice to hear that from Tony," Martin says, smiling. "It's the first time I've had validation of that era."

So, given Sabbath's treatment of him, why did Martin remain so loyal?

"In the beginning, I was essentially a nobody off the street," he says modestly. "It must have been hard work

dragging your younger brother around as he learns the ropes. It [getting sacked twice] didn't feel great, but I don't harbour any bad feeling."

Is there a scenario in which the two Tonys could work together again?

"I'd be up for that, and I'm here if Tony needs me," Martin offers. "But I don't realistically think there's any chance of it."

"Like I keep on saying, I never write anything off," Iommi says, grinning. "I'm doing my own album at the minute, and I played on two songs for Ozzy [for his most recent solo album *Patient Number 9*], but I never know what's next. I enjoyed working with the Black Sabbath Ballet [in Birmingham]. I've done some other things that aren't out yet so I can't mention them. Obviously I won't be touring the world for eighteen months again. I'm just happy being where I am. My life is never boring."

Black Sabbath's Anno Domini 1989-1995 is available now via B&MG.





The Soundtrack Of My Life

Metal Queen **Doro** on the records, artists and gigs that are of lasting significance to her.

Interview: Jo Kendall



DORO PESCH: JOCHEN ROLFES/PRESS; LEMMY: GETTY

Doro Pesch, who is celebrating 40 years in rock, runs down the mixtape of her life. She heard Little Richard as a toddler, survived a punkocalypse with her first band, Snakebite, and became the high priestess of metal in Warlock and as a solo artist.

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

When I was three years old I heard *Lucille* by Little Richard. That's when I knew I wanted to be a singer.

THE FIRST SONG I PERFORMED LIVE

My first band was Snakebite, and my first gig with them was in a punk club in Dusseldorf. There were thirty metalheads and about a hundred and twenty punks there. At that time they didn't get along, so it was a total riot. The first song I sang was called *Shakedown*. I did my best... Then the punks got fed up with us because they wanted to hear punk rock, so they came on stage and destroyed our amps and instruments. That was my first gig! It was hard work.

THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

As a teenager and still in school, the album that got me was Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here*. My favourite girlfriend was called Angie, and we'd go to her apartment, sit in the living room, close the curtains and listen to it. We got high without drink or anything. It's a record that still takes me to another sphere.

THE GUITAR HERO

I love Randy Rhoads's playing so much, but I never got the chance to meet him. I took part in a tribute in 2019 and sang *Goodbye To Romance*, alongside some other excellent guitarists. Randy was beautiful; he had this wonderful aura, and whenever you saw him he was smiling.

THE SINGER

Can I name three? David Coverdale was the first concert I'd seen and I was blown away by his voice, his performance, his sexiness. Rob Halford was my second-ever concert, and he could sing so high and was so *metal*! Then there's Ronnie Dio, who I saw many times, and I loved how he'd vibe with the fans.

THE SONGWRITER

I grew up with glam rock: Suzi Quatro, Sweet, Slade, T.Rex, and my favourite songwriting team was Chapman and Chinn. I always thought: "Oh, I would love to work with them", but they split up. I'll love them forever for *Ballroom Blitz*.

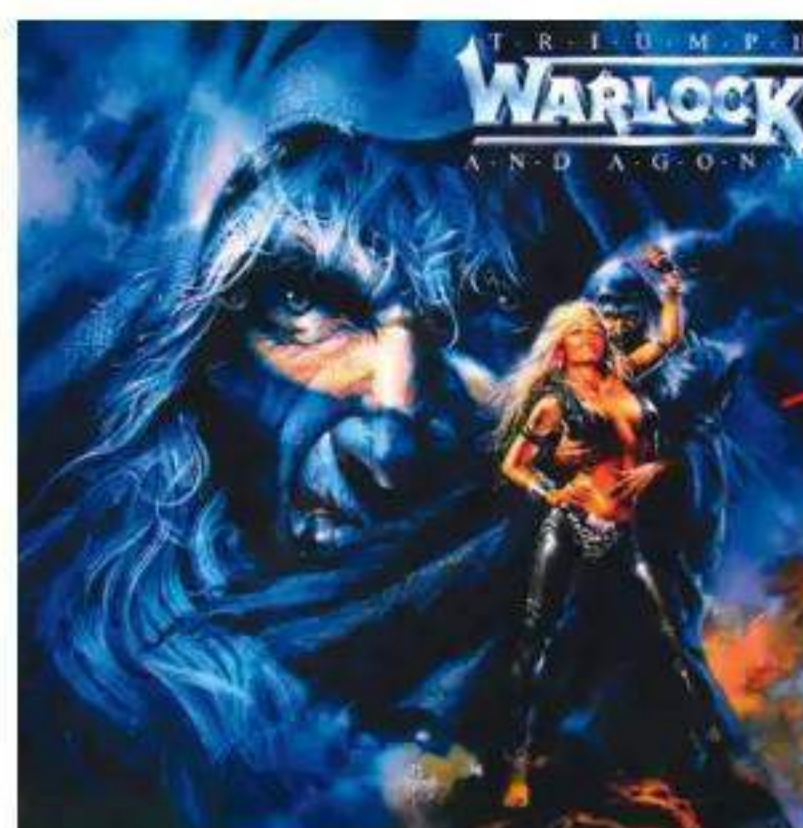
THE CULT HERO

Lemmy! He was totally unique; a great voice, and his bass playing had such attitude. We became friends. Although he looked quite rough and scary on the

outside, inside he was a sweet and sensitive soul, very intelligent, and someone who gave a fuck. I became an even bigger fan of his by knowing him.

THE BEST RECORD I MADE

From the Warlock era, it's the album *Triumph And Agony*, which still makes people go crazy when they hear it. From the Doro era, I want to say the new one [laughs], but also *Calling The Wild* [2000]. It had my first two duets ever, and they were with Lemmy, *Love Me Forever*, and an acoustic one, *Alone Again*, which was so emotional.



THE WORST RECORD I MADE

It's from *True As Steel*, which was a pretty good album, but the record label wanted something more commercial as a single. We were like: "No fucking way." But we had to make compromises. I wrote a song called *Heaven's Like Hellfire*, but I was given a co-writer who said: "I can make that a little better." That made my stomach turn. It became *Igloo On The Moon*. What metalhead would understand that title? I had to sing it, through tears. From this experience I learned to not do what you don't feel comfortable with.

MY GUILTY PLEASURE

I grew up with classical music. Years later I used to go to this Italian restaurant all the time, and hear a track playing in there that I loved. No one knew what it was, until one day a waiter told me: *Caruso* by Luciano Pavarotti. I had to buy it, and then I had to record it! It was included as a bonus track on my [2018] album *Forever Warriors, Forever United*.

THE MOST UNDERRATED BAND EVER

I got heavily inspired by Rock Goddess and the singer Jody Turner. One of my favourite songs was *My Angel*. I first saw them play it on UK TV. I listened to it over and over. This fantastic band, all women and with two sisters in, should have been much bigger.

MY SATURDAY NIGHT/PARTY SONG

The ultimate party song is [Judas Priest's] *Living After Midnight*. It makes people really happy. I've covered it on my new album, *Conquers*, with Rob Halford!

THE SONG THAT MAKES ME CRY

Nothing Compares 2 You by Sinead O'Connor. Her version is so beautiful, so moving. I did it as a duet with another German singer [Xavier Naidoo, in 2017] and I really felt the emotion.

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

It's *Für Immer* from *Triumph And Agony*. The fans are always deep inside my mind, and I had this tattooed on my arm: "The one who loves the fans... für immer." This song would be saying to the fans: "Don't be too sad, we'll meet again on the other side." That's something I truly believe in. 🕯

Conquers - Forever Strong And Proud is out now via Nuclear Blast.

"Lemmy was totally unique; a great voice, and his bass playing had such attitude."

THE
★CLASSIC★
Rock
INTERVIEW
**JON
BON JOVI**

“There was no Plan B in my life, ever,” he says. Luckily he didn’t need one. He started in covers bands, got the breaks, went on to mastermind one of the biggest and biggest-selling bands of his era, and became one of its biggest rock stars. And there’s more – much more...

Interview: **Paul Brannigan**

November 7, 1979. The Atlantic City Expressway are on stage at the Stone Pony club in Asbury Park, New Jersey, performing a cover of Bruce Springsteen’s *The Promised Land*, when an audience member jumps on stage, grabs the mic and begins singing the second verse. It takes Atlantic City Expressway’s vocalist John Bongiovi a beat to recognise the interloper as the man who wrote the song.

“I’m a seventeen-year-old kid and suddenly I’m sharing a microphone on stage with the biggest rock star in New Jersey,” he – now Jon Bon Jovi – marvels, 45 years on, looking back on that night while seated on a sofa in an upmarket London hotel room. “I’ve got high school in the morning, and the teacher just sounds like ‘Wah wah wah, wah wah wah’, because I’m thinking Bruce will probably want me to come over to his house tomorrow, now that we’re friends. I had rainbows and unicorns in my head, like an acid trip, because now I had seen the world in colour.”

An astute, driven polymath, a music industry lifer with 130 million album sales to his name,

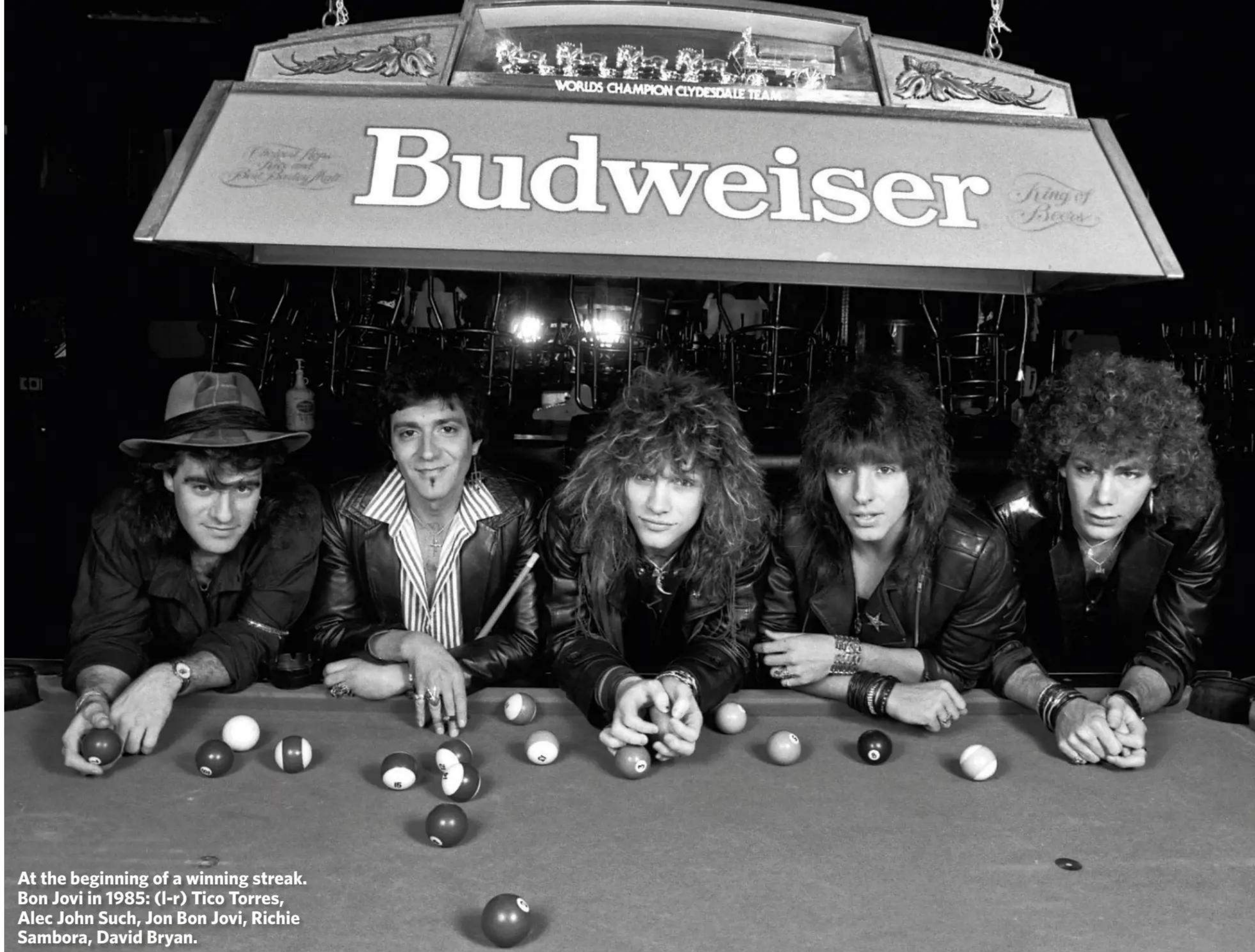
it’s a long time since Jon Bon Jovi had his head in the clouds. The singer/guitarist/band leader is in London to talk up two new projects: his band Bon Jovi’s forthcoming sixteenth album, *Forever*, set for release on June 7, and *Thank You, Goodnight: The Bon Jovi Story*, an insightful four-part Hulu documentary, directed by Gotham Chopra, who has previously made films about American sporting icons Serena Williams, Kobe Bryant, Tom Brady and others,

which aims to shine a light on “a 40-year odyssey of rock’n’roll idolatry”. It’s a measure of how hard Bon Jovi has been working during his four-day stay in London that this afternoon, mid-sentence, he’ll cast a glance across the River Thames, spot an iconic landmark on the South Bank, and exclaim excitedly: “Wait, is that the London Eye?” as if he’s only just now had a moment to take in his surroundings. But then as *Thank You, Goodnight* makes abundantly clear, JBJ has always had his eyes fixed on the prize. “There was no Plan B in my life, ever,” he states emphatically at one point. “It was all or nothing.”

With that said, the 62-year-old hasn’t forgotten what it’s like to be a rock’n’roll dreamer, hoping for ➤







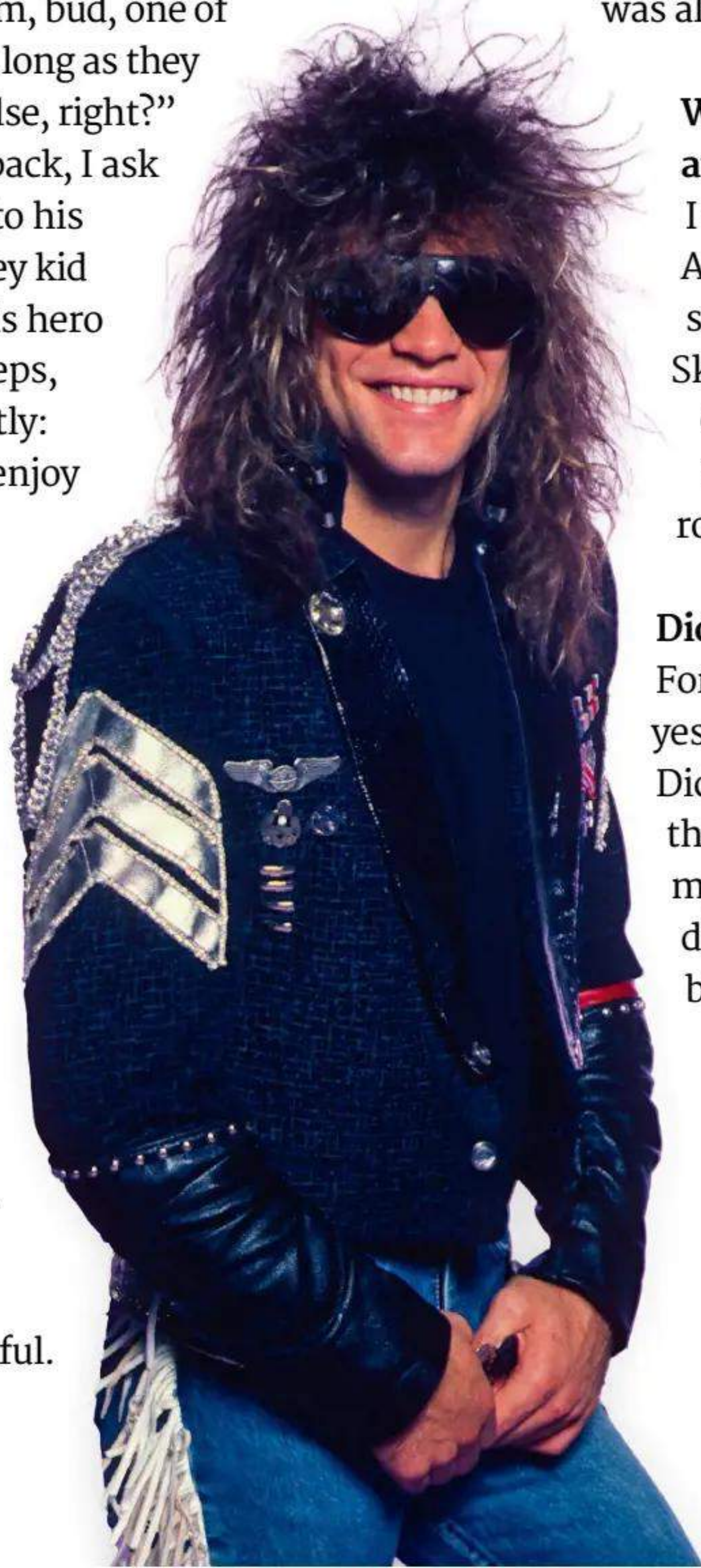
At the beginning of a winning streak. Bon Jovi in 1985: (l-r) Tico Torres, Alec John Such, Jon Bon Jovi, Richie Sambora, David Bryan.

a break. At the end of our hour together, I ask him if he'll record a video message for a friend, an aspiring singer-songwriter who's ploughed thousands of pounds of his own money into recording two albums, encouraging him to keep the faith. Graciously, after quickly checking that his hair is looking good – it is – he does as requested, ending a genuinely touching inspirational speech with the words: “As you know, writing a song is the most euphoria one can ever feel, so keep writing ‘em, bud, one of them is gonna click. And as long as they move you, fuck everybody else, right?”

As he passes my phone back, I ask him what advice he'd give to his teenage self, that New Jersey kid dreaming of following in his hero Bruce Springsteen's footsteps, and his reply comes instantly: “I'd say: ‘Take the time to enjoy it a little more.’”

Do you remember who John Bongiovanni was before music entered your life?

The earliest recollections I have of the twelve-year-old me are very similar to the me I grew up to be, with maybe more of an athletic focus, because I liked to play baseball and football. I had a very typical middle-class upbringing in New Jersey, and initially it was uneventful.



Your mum was a florist and your dad was a barber, and they'd both served in the Marines. They did. That's how they met.

So was yours quite a disciplined household? I didn't think so. And probably nowhere near the upbringing that they had as children. It was a different generation by then. I was born into the era where John Kennedy was the President of the United States, and so The Dream in America was alive and well.

What was the first music that felt authentically yours?

I remember buying the first Aerosmith record, and by the mid-seventies it was Thin Lizzy, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Queen, Zeppelin, Alice Cooper, Elton... mainstream, heavily English-influenced rock'n'roll.

Did punk rock impinge on your life?

For the big brothers of my buddies, yes. We were very aware of The Dictators, The Dead Boys, Ramones, the Pistols, obviously, but it wasn't my personal calling. I didn't dislike it, but it was music for our big brothers.

Do you remember your first time on stage?

It was a talent show in Sayreville, New Jersey. I sang *Strutter* by Kiss, *Johnny B. Goode*, and *Taking Care Of Business* by Bachman Turner Overdrive. I did not win.

But you gave it a shot.

I gave it a shot.

The standard potted history of Jon Bon Jovi is: kid wants to be a rock star, kid works in his cousin's recording studio, kid gets a break with the song *Runaway*, kid becomes a rock star. But watching the *Thank You, Goodnight* documentary, it's obvious that you put in the hard yards, first with Raze, then the Atlantic City Expressway, a covers band that I guess was doing good business, and then The Rest who did original songs.

Atlantic City Expressway weren't doing great business, really, but we were performing. I was still in high school, and we were playing in nightclubs where the other bands were ten years older than us, so being that young we stood out. But I knew that to get off that circuit I needed to write my own music.

What did The Rest sound like?

Power-pop/new wave, like New Romantic music, Elvis Costello, whatever. Not great.

“I remember hearing *Runaway* in the car. I wanted the police to pull me over so that I could say: ‘That’s me on the radio!’”

You started to properly take control of your own destiny with Jon Bongiovi & The Wild Ones, a band who were heavily influenced by the Jersey Shore scene.

Yeah, and that scene was inspiring. Because remember there were ten Asbury Jukes and seven members of the E Street Band, so that's seventeen iterations of Santa Claus who would be in one of the local bars on any given night. You could literally tap them on the shoulder, buy them a beer and ask them anything. And those guys were so kind and generous with their time. Like, Southside Johnny produced the second set of demos that The Rest ever did, and Roy Bittan, from the E Street Band, first played that keyboard riff you know today in *Runaway*.

And then you went to work at The Power Station studio in New York with your cousin Tony.

He's a distant cousin, I'd never met him, but my dad asked him to come and see me perform with The Rest, and he told him: "The band's not very good, but your kid's got something going." So after high school, in September 1980, I called him up, and he allowed me to run errands at the studio.

In the documentary, you say that sometimes you had to bring drugs to the studio, and sometimes you had to bring girls. Could you elaborate on that?

No, I'm gonna leave that there. But that was the era.

You were there when Queen and David Bowie recorded *Under Pressure*. That must have been kinda mind-blowing.

That's my recollection. I've asked my cousin Barry to verify this, saying: "Am I crazy, or is that true?" And he said: "You're right." I'm putting this in a big parenthesis for fear that my memory has slipped, but I do believe that I watched in Studio A as the two of those guys sang.

***Runaway* was a radio hit before Bon Jovi, the band, existed. But initially, when you sent it to record labels, no one was interested.**

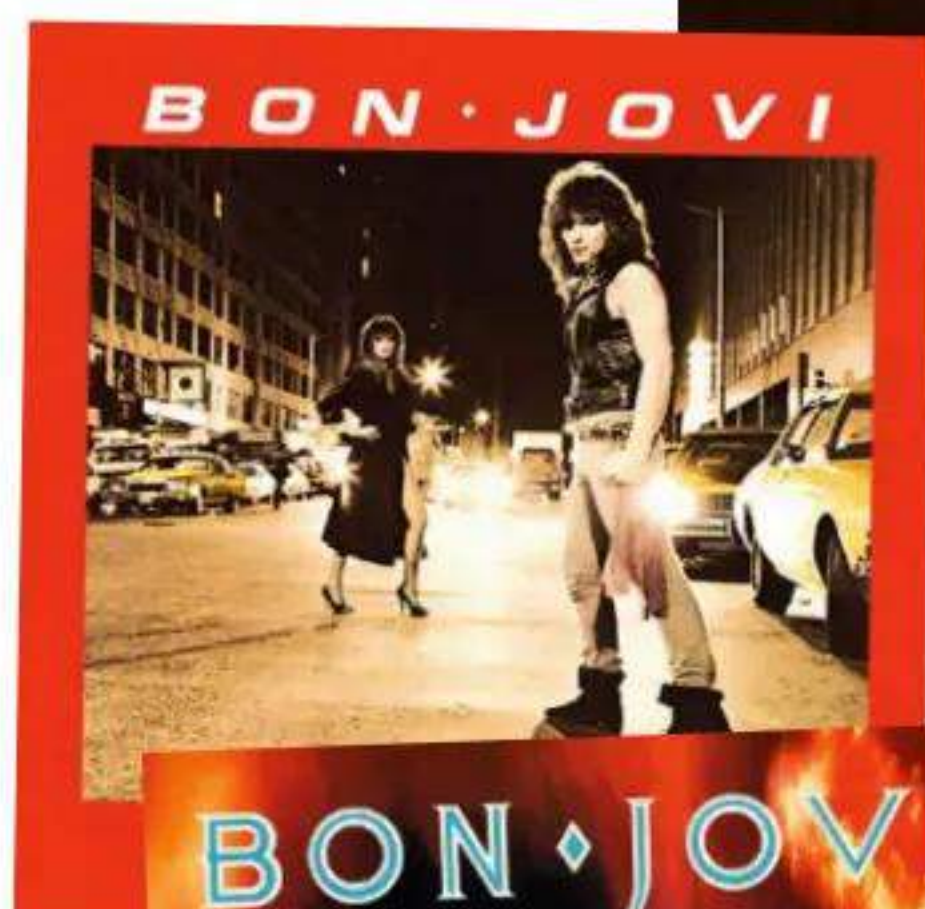
I didn't get any answers from anyone, no. But, in retrospect, did it ever actually land on anyone's desk? Did it ever make it out of the mail room? I'll never know. I'd sent it out to all the labels with a handwritten note, because that was the only way I knew to approach them. It wasn't like anyone I knew in Jersey knew the president of a record label.

How did it feel to hear your song, your voice, on the radio for the first time?

I was overjoyed. I remember hearing it on the radio in the car, and it made me want to roll the windows down and drive faster. I wanted the police to pull me over so that that I could say: "That's me on the radio!"

So now you just needed a new band.

Yes. At the time, I was playing a club called the Fast Lane at least two nights a week, and I was



capable of drawing – if I'm generous to myself here – maybe a hundred and twenty-five people to come and see me play with various iterations

of the Wild Ones.

So I get this song on the radio, and the quality of my band members I thought could be better, so I started seeking out guys that I'd seen around. I thought that when I got this new iteration together – which did not include Richie [Sambora] – that it would last for three weeks, because I figured that after three weeks this song will have run its course, but maybe a hundred and fifty people would come to see me now, and I could build from there. That was the mind-set.

With Richie, what was it that you recognised in him that made you think: "This is the guy"?

He came to see us play when Snake Sabo [Skid Row] was filling in on guitar. Dave [Bryan] was

playing keyboards because he had been in the Expressway, Alec [John Such, bass] I'd recruited from a cover band, and Tico [Torres] was the best drummer I've ever fucking seen. Alec got Richie over to see us.

So when Richie shows up, he comes in the dressing room, and we make small talk and I like his presence. So I say: "Well, what are you into?" And he says: "I like Bad Company, and Zeppelin, and I've got my own band, and we're putting out an EP." So we got together once, we started to dabble in writing, and it worked.

Then *Runaway* exploded, I got a record deal, and Richie said: "Okay, I'd rather come with you, with a record deal, than keep slogging it out with my band." I liked him, he was a talented guy, and he could sing. So that was it – Bon Jovi.

What do you remember about the first time you played in England?

It was the Kiss tour, in 1984. I remember we ➤



Good medicine: JBJ fronting Bon Jovi at Wembley Stadium in 1995.

Boys just wanna have fun: JBJ (right) and Richie Sambora in 1993.



started in Brighton, and Kiss were out with their spray cans of paint, fixing up their set in the afternoon, so that blew away your childhood memories of watching them at the [Madison Square] Garden! One of our roadies had worked with Phil Lynott in Grand Slam, and I was so excited about that. So fuck yeah, I remember being here. I remember Malcolm Dome giving us a good review in *Kerrang!* We thought we'd made it.

The old cliché is that you've got your whole life to make your first album, and then, like, get six weeks to make your second one. Did your second, 7800° Fahrenheit, feel rushed? It didn't set the world on fire.

It didn't, but we did the best we could with our limited knowledge of any aspect of record making, and no great guidance from either the record company or management. Let's not be too harsh, it did okay – 750,000 record sales in America – so the curve was still going upwards.

Did you have to set your ego aside when you brought in songwriter Desmond Child for the next album, *Slippery When Wet*?

[Sighs deeply] Okay, let me clarify this again, which I've probably done about one hundred times already. I saw from afar Bryan Adams, who I considered a peer, break to a different level when he did a song [*It's Only Love* on 1984's *Reckless* album] with Tina Turner. I'd had four songs that had made the charts, none had the world on fire, but we were doing okay. So I was like: "Wait a minute, let's write a song

for someone else." I asked our A&R guy Derek Shulman, who was formerly the singer with Gentle Giant: "How do you go about this?" He says: "Adams is writing with a guy named Jim Vallance." I say: "Well, do you know people that do this?" He says: "I know a guy", and mentioned Desmond Child. Now remember, Desmond Child's only song at that time was [Kiss's 'disco' single] *I Was Made For Loving You*. He had two records of his own, which didn't do anything, but I knew his picture, because right outside the door of The Fast Lane dressing room there was a photo of a guy who looked like David Bryan, with curly blond hair, and three chicks. So we write [*You Give Love A*] *Bad Name*. All of us go: "This is too good to give to Loverboy." And a relationship began, and it changed all of our lives.

Is it true that Desmond Child and Richie literally begged you on their knees to record *Living On A Prayer*, because you didn't think it was all that special?

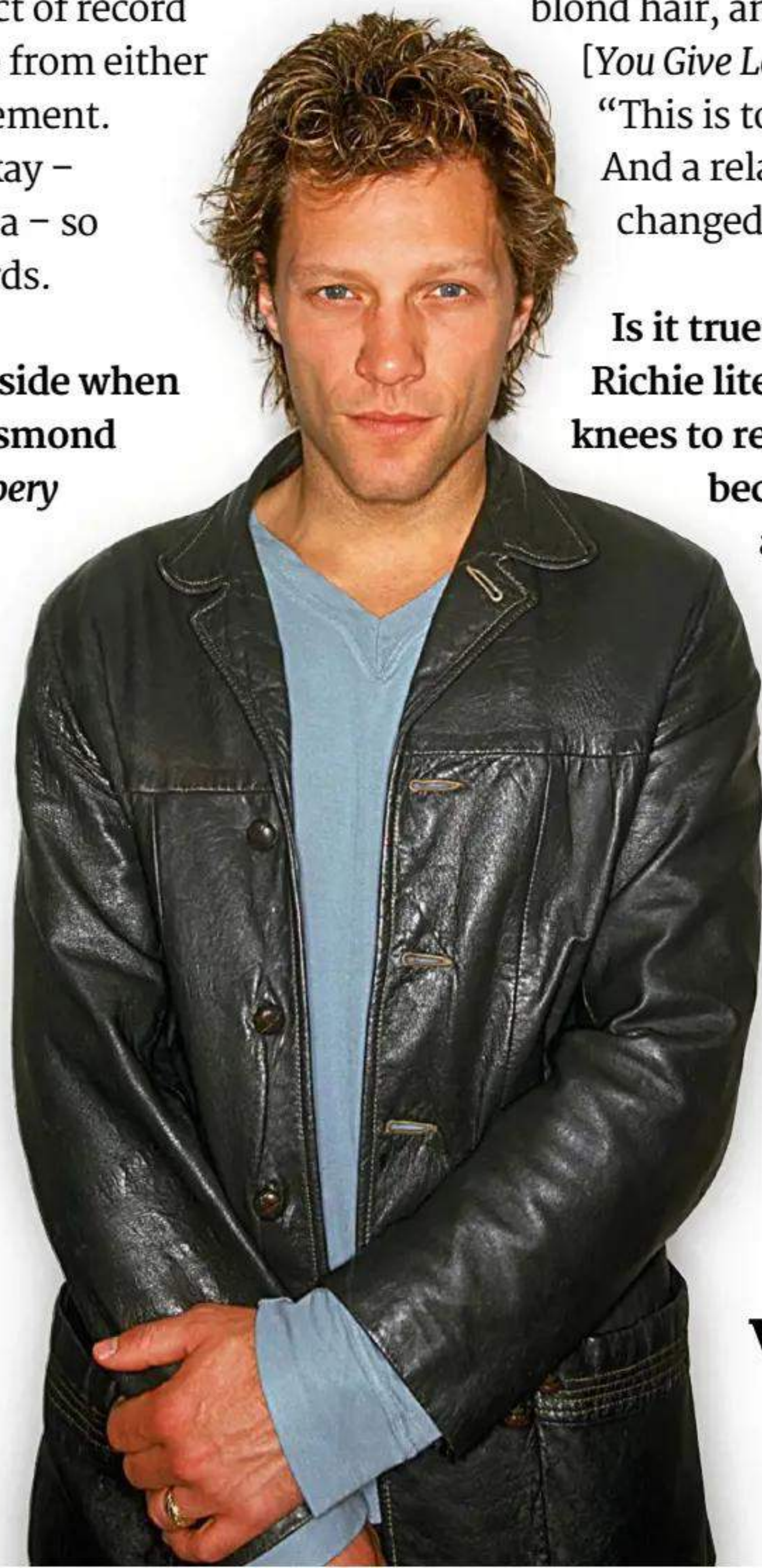
That's a bit exaggerated. I was like: "Oh, it's good, but..." To me, *Bad Name* had more of the anthemic, radio-friendly sound of the time, like Joan Jett's cover of *I Love Rock 'N' Roll*, or Robert Palmer's *Addicted To*

Love, or Twisted Sister's *We're Not Gonna Take It*. And I was like: "We need that." And you couldn't have heard that in the first demo we did.

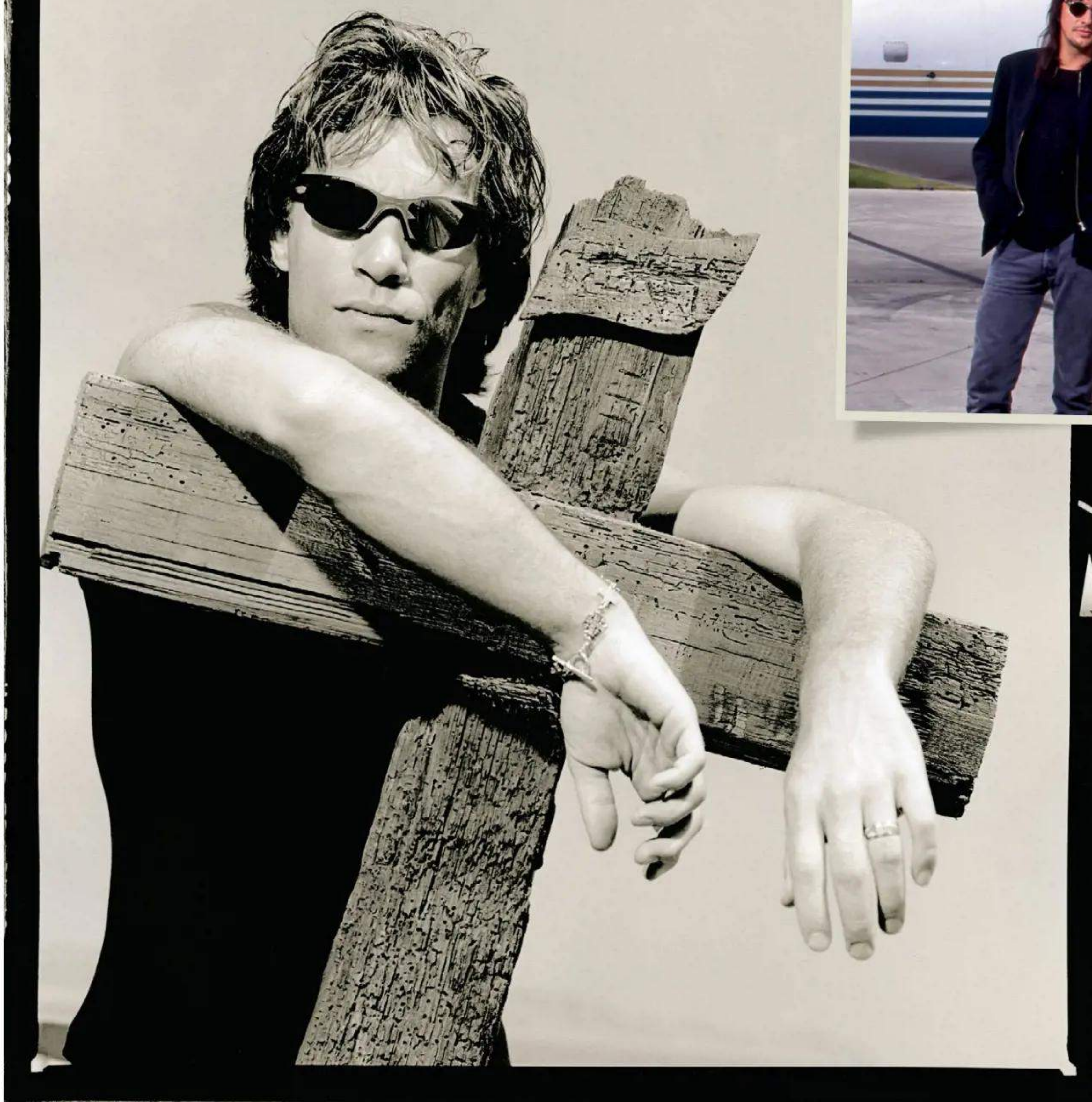
The master stroke, it seemed to me, with *Slippery When Wet*, was those faked 'concert' videos for *You Give Love A Bad Name* and *Living On A Prayer*, because: a) the band looked fucking huge, and b) every single teenage boy in the world, this one included, was like: "Look at all those girls at that gig!"

[JBJ gives a thumbs up] Right? Look, if you were lucky enough to learn how to make a record, let alone write a hit song, that was amazing. But now they want to thrust you into this film business? Fuck that. We didn't know how to make a good video, but by the time we got to that third album we were smart enough to know that: a) we were very good live band, and b) we had to capture that on film. If you go back and look for the *Silent Night* promo twelve-inch, we've all got our fingers up to our lips, and it says: "The best-kept secret in rock and roll." Now it was time to let everyone in on that secret.

"We never had a fight, it wasn't about money, it wasn't about girlfriends, it wasn't about drugs. We were *exhausted*."



Still keeping the faith: JBJ in 1996.



It worked. *Slippery When Wet* turned Bon Jovi into the biggest band in the world. Can you remember how that felt?

I remember my parents saying to me: "Now everybody knows your name." Until then, our parents would tell their friends: "My kid's in a band, and they have a record deal, and they're opening for Ratt at the Meadowlands Arena. Would you like to come?" *Slippery* comes, and that's the end of supporting anyone ever again in our lives. So that changed everything.

Did you feel like a rock star then?
I felt like a rock star in Raze! [laughs]

Then with *New Jersey* you did it all over again, and became even bigger. In the documentary, you mention that at that point you could just click your fingers and get anything that you wanted. So, if you'll excuse my French, what stopped you turning into a bit of a c*nt? Each other... and New Jersey. And by New Jersey I mean more than just our neighbours, but our upbringing. I realised, touring with those West Coast bands and those arena-rock acts, and being on the same management roster as Mötley Crüe, that that wasn't what I aspired to be, as a behavioural pattern. We got lumped into that because we looked like the rest of them, as did all the kids in the malls at that time. But that's when I was very aware of: 'don't aspire to that, aspire for more, aspire to be different.'

In *Thank You, Goodnight* you mention that you were never into rock-star 'over-indulgence', because you'd had some bad experiences when you were younger.
Yeah, really naive stuff.

Like what?
Something as innocent as something that was laced into the pot. Because I didn't have the constitution for it. Which was wonderful, because I wasn't indulging the way others were.

Everyone was doing cocaine at that time.
And everything else.

Wasn't it difficult for you to sit on the sidelines?
No. I could have a few drinks and be happy. And I didn't feel the need to follow anybody. If that was what was going to endear me to a group of people, I just wasn't interested.

By the end of the *New Jersey* tour, in early 1990, everybody in the band was pretty frazzled, and things were fractious. Then you went on to your solo career. Did that feel liberating?
Yes. To get back to the joy of making

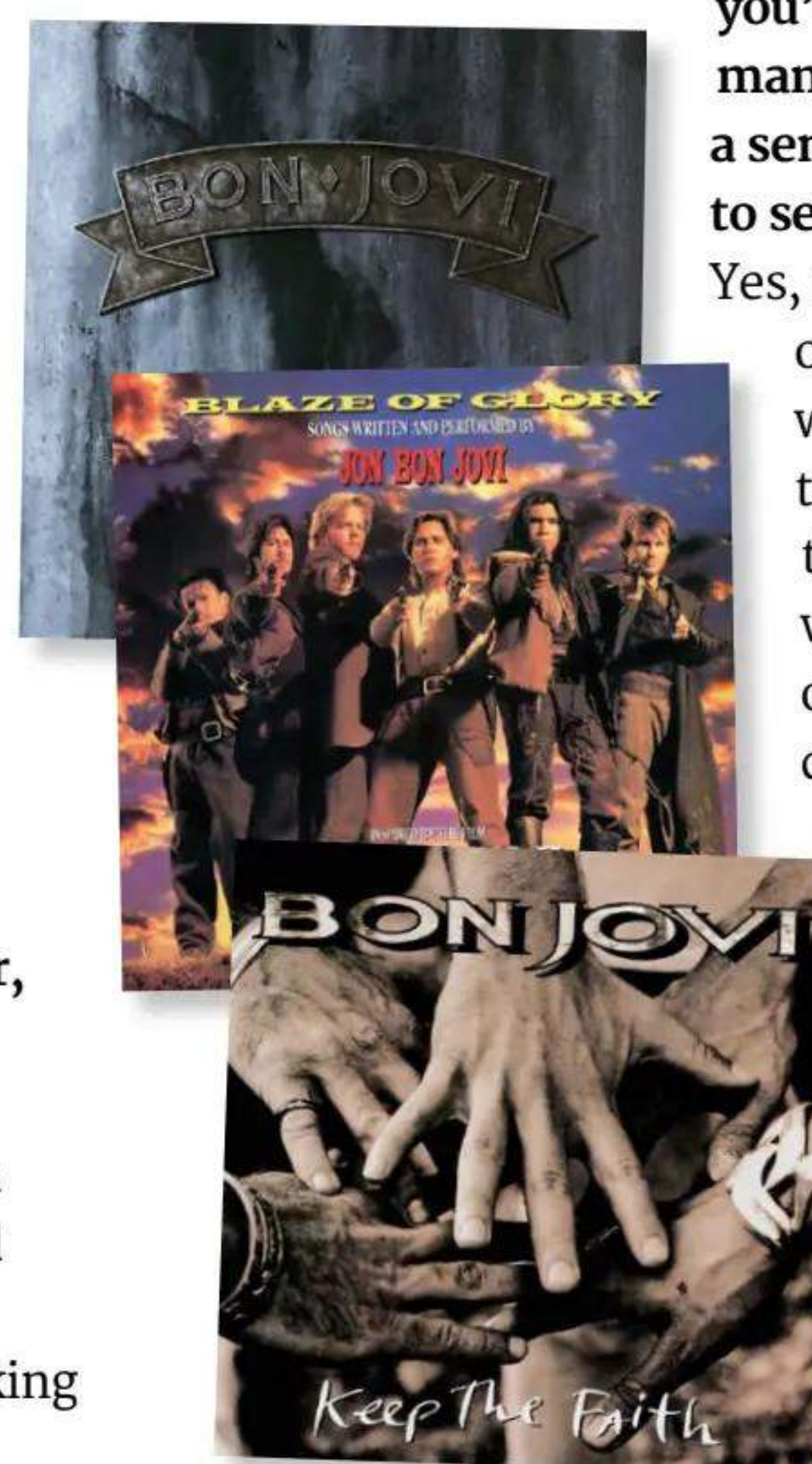
music, to try to figure out why we were confused, because... [in Bon Jovi] we never had a fight, it wasn't about money, it wasn't about girlfriends, it wasn't about drugs. We were exhausted, physically and mentally. So I go off and do [the soundtrack for *Young Guns II* [aka *Blaze Of Glory*], and it was liberating on a number of fronts, because: a) I proved that I knew how to do it, and b) I proved that I knew how to do it again – and not only again, but alone. It also introduced me to acting, which was hugely important to the next chapter of the band's success.

Did you think, even for a minute or two: "You know what, I'll stick with going it alone"?
No, I did not. I only ever wanted to be with these guys. But after what is now six-to-seven years of being together twenty-four-seven, it was the same jokes, it was the same stories, it was the same meal, it was the same vacations together. You had every right to be exhausted and burned out and tired of each other. And Doc [McGhee, Bon Jovi's manager at the time] did us no favours. In retrospect I don't blame him, but he did us no favours if he was supposed to be the grown-up in the room. He should have said: "You guys are fucking exhausted." But they didn't, the collective agents, lawyers, managers.

The band's next album, in 1992, is *Keep The Faith*. Grunge has happened by then, even bands like U2 are changing their sound, and

you've decided to part ways with management and be a DIY band, in a sense. Was that album title a note to self as much as anything else?
Yes, to the collective 'we'. The audacity of us to tell the grunge world that we're just going to be independent, that we didn't want to be a part of the new fashionable thing, that we were going to just evolve, and do our own thing. And for me to convince those four guys that we didn't need not only Doc, but anyone else, was audacious.

You mentioned your acting career earlier. With that did you enjoy being a novice again, because you've walked into this other world where you're the new ➤





Blaze of glory: Richie Sambora and JBJ reunite at the Rock And Roll Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony in 2018.



Jersey boys: JBJ and Bruce Springsteen at The Concert For Sandy Relief at NYC's Madison Square Garden, December 2012.

kid and you don't have the chops that other experienced actors do.

Well, I privately studied acting several days a week for two years before I even went to an audition. I didn't just walk in and have the audacity to say: "I know how to do this." But what it offered me, and what I brought back to the band... had we not had that, when I jumped off that cliff to self-management and cutting my hair off, was the humility of starting over again, at something else in the arts, with all the experience of super rock stardom. So those two things made for a very strong thirty-year-old version of me. I could go back to the band and say don't believe the hype from *Slippery*, don't believe the hype of *New Jersey*, don't believe that I'm doing anything different because of the success of *Blaze of Glory*. If we come back, humble and hungry, and all put our fucking hands in and say: "Okay, I get it", nobody's gonna believe in us more than we believe in us, and let's give this a shot.

By the time you started work on *What About Now* though, in 2012, Richie says he thought the band were getting stale.

I didn't think so, and the collective we didn't think so. I personally thought that everything was going incredibly fucking well. And it was never brought up in the room, or in the writing, or in the recording, or during the first twenty shows of that tour.

Obviously on a professional level, his exit mid-tour, on the day of a show in Calgary, threw you a curve ball. On a personal level did it hurt a bit too?

It was a shock. Nobody anticipated it, no one saw it coming. I talked to him the day before, I remember it so well. It was Easter Sunday, 2013, and I was driving through the Lincoln Tunnel as I was talking to him, because I was living in New York, and I was like: "Yeah, I'm feeling great, the album is gonna come in at Number One, see you up there." He said: "Can I stay home one more day?" "Of course. You want

to fly private tomorrow? Sure. Do it. I don't care. See you up there." And then the next day the phone rings at three in the afternoon, and, you know... "I can't go on."

In the documentary, there's a moment where the interviewer asks you: "How long did it take you to get over it?" And you say: "I'm still not over it, ten years later."

Sure. I'm heartbroken.

So what's to stop you bringing him back now?

How many times have you seen him in the last eleven years?

Well, none. But I was never expecting to run into him, to be fair.

I've talked to him twice.

Wow. Why?

[Slowly, as if explaining to a child] He. Quit. The. Band. I swear to Christ there was never a fight, nothing. David and Tico have talked to him once, at the [Rock And Roll] Hall Of Fame induction. He wasn't kicked out, he quit. And he hasn't made any great overtures about coming back.

Okay. Because I feel like that's not the public

perception. The public perception is that he's willing to go back, but...

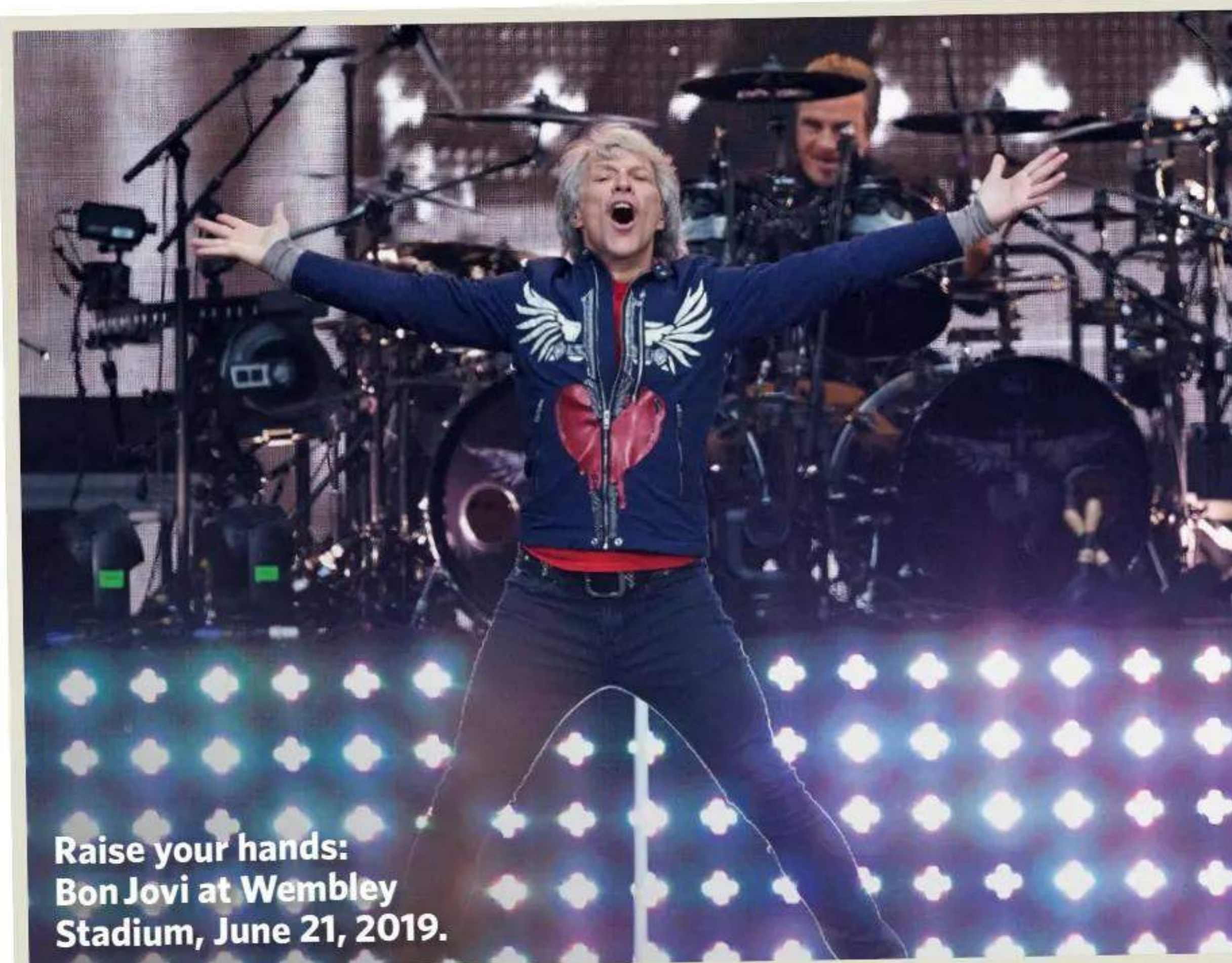
But what? Life goes on. You have to get your reader to understand just one thing, because I'm as confused as anyone else was. If you or I commit to a job, and you don't show up for the job, people are going to be let down. The band were let down, that's something you can assume. Oh, and by the way, there's also a hundred and twenty guys waiting on a pay cheque on Friday. Oh, and then there's the fans that travelled to see this band, and bought tickets, hotels, flights. And there's the promoter that paid us the money to do a hundred shows... You've got responsibilities. So we went on. It was that simple.

You mentioned the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame induction. Your speech there had one of the all-time great intro lines, where you said something like: "I've written this speech in my head many times, and sometimes it's the 'Thank you' speech, and sometimes it's the 'Fuck you' speech." Did it sting that you were overlooked for so long by that institution, or by the Grammys committee?

Getting overlooked for Grammys is almost a badge of honour. The Beatles or Zeppelin or the Stones weren't getting any, but Beyonce has twenty-seven? They're not naturally drawn to rock bands. Whatever. And the Hall Of Fame is like an old white man's club, with a secret ballot. It was a little fiefdom. So no, it didn't sting that we were overlooked. We've had some of the biggest albums of all time, we can live without trophies.

Would you swap the sales of *Slippery* or *New Jersey* for the critical acclaim of Bruce Springsteen's *Nebraska*?

No, no, no, no, no, no. Anything that's happened to us - the good, the bad and the indifferent - all the information that got me here today, I wouldn't trade that for anything.



Raise your hands: Bon Jovi at Wembley Stadium, June 21, 2019.



An extraordinary life to reflect on: Jon Bon Jovi in 2024.

In the documentary, you're very honest about the issues you've had with your voice. I saw you at Wembley Stadium in 2019, and, respectfully – you're Jon Bon Jovi and what do I know? – it didn't sound good. But later I went back and watched a video from that show on YouTube, with you singing *Always*, and what struck me was that you were really giving it everything. Everything.

You're quite self-critical, and you know when something's not as good as it could be. So to do that night after night, going on stage knowing you're not killing it, isn't that difficult?

It's so fucking hard. It's hardest thing I've ever had to deal with. Imagine knowing it's not working right, and you can't figure out why. It was tough.

How do you cope with that mentally? It was fucking tough.

Did you have to do something like see a therapist to talk you through it?

One? [Laughs dryly]. You just have to hold on, and give it your all. So, Wembley 2019. Yes, it wasn't like it was in 2000 or 1995. Or any of the other times I played in that building. I knew that. I won't argue with you.

On a more positive note, 2020 was a very brave album, because lyrically it's the most politicised, or at least the most socially conscious, Bon Jovi album. Tackling subjects such as the murder of George Floyd, or immigration to the US, you must have known you were going to alienate a huge chunk of your fan base.

My job is not to pander. My job was simply to narrate. Artistically, that album was very fulfilling. I'm really proud of it.

To circle back to where we started, some of your lyrics on that album were like lyrics Springsteen might have written.

I take that as a compliment. It's good songwriting and it's good storytelling. At that time the world was shut down, and you and I are both home watching television and reading the papers, because that's all we've got, right? And so now I take on the role of narrator. As a songwriter, that's my job. So I write about George Floyd and

obstacles I've faced, but all these punches in the face that you take are what gets you to where you are.

And where you are now? Are you as happy now as you've ever been?

Am I happy? I'm very content with where I am in my life. It's all part of the journey. I'm definitely not the guy I was at twenty or thirty or forty, or even fifty. It all changes. I'm here as the Ghost Of Christmas Future to tell you that it all changes. So am I happy? Yeah, I'm really happy. In *Legendary* I sing: 'I got what I want, because I got what I need.' Which sounds simple, but it resonates. I'm talking about your family, your friends, God willing, your health, and that's a full-circle moment that I couldn't have said when I was twenty or thirty or forty. Where am I now? I found joy.

Speaking of statements, and of full circles, God forbid that a music journalist would read something into something that doesn't exist, but the combination of an album called *Forever*, and a career-spanning documentary titled *Thank You, Goodnight*, would seem to be the things one might write before writing *The End*. I hope that's not the case. And it's not my intention.

If it was to be the case, it's not a bad way to exit. *Forever* is a really strong album, and it's full of energy and joy and love from start to finish. Still got it, right? Still got it. 🍷

Forever is out now via EMI. *Thank You, Goodnight* is available on Disney+

“I swear to Christ, there was never a fight, nothing. Richie wasn't kicked out of the band, he quit.”

I write about covid, and I write about guns, and I write about Trump...

How do you feel about the prospect of that man coming back to power?

You know, my job now is to stay out of the way and pray. It will be up to the electorate. I can only pray for the future of the world.

On the new Bon Jovi album *Forever*, there's a really good line on the song *Seeds*, where you sing: 'You don't have to fix what is broken, you only get better at coping', which is a very mature kind of reflection.

Yeah. We've talked today about the various



★ CLASSIC ★ ROCK

HIGH VOLTAGE ⚡ ROCK'N'ROLL



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AC/DC/50



It's the 50th anniversary of AC/DC – half a century of riffs, rambunctiousness, schoolboy uniforms and some of the greatest rock'n'roll music ever created.

To mark this momentous occasion we asked rock's finest to talk about their favourite albums by the Australian icons. Over the next 15 pages you'll find Paul Stanley, Joe Elliott, Cheap Trick's Rick Nielsen, Biff Byford, Airbourne's Joel O'Keeffe and many more celebrating the genius of *Back In Black*, *Highway To Hell*, *Powerage*, *High Voltage*, *Black Ice* and every other album they made.

Let there be rock...





MAIN: ALAMY; BIFF BYFORD: MICK HUTSON / GETTY

"I PLAYED HIGH VOLTAGE FOR FIVE MONTHS STRAIGHT!"

Saxon's **Biff Byford** on how AC/DC's debut album changed his life for ever.



"Someone gave me a cassette of *High Voltage*, and the second I heard *It's A Long Way To The Top (If You Wanna Rock 'N' Roll)* I immediately ran to the boys [in Saxon] to show it them. I played it in our van for about five months straight! But the band's whole DNA changed.

We liked the energy of punk, because it was fast and furious, but we needed AC/DC for that groove. Put the two together and you get Saxon.

"*It's A Long Way To The Top* tells you everything you need to know about being in a rock band. Bon always wrote great lyrics. He was a bit of a gangster, and that stuff is very linked with rock music somehow. When we started out it was a dangerous place! A lot of people from dodgy upbringings, for want of a better word, were always attracted to rock music. About sixteen/seventeen we'd do a bit of shoplifting and nicking stuff from people's gardens. Bon got that stuff.



HIGH VOLTAGE
(Albert/Alantic, 1976)

Top: the Bon Scott-fronted AC/DC that blew Biff away.

"I remember going to see AC/DC for the first time in Sheffield. I don't think it was the first tour they did in the UK, but it was definitely an early one. They had the UK Subs supporting, which was really fucking bizarre. The Subs came on stage and something happened, and next thing we knew, the bass player had jumped into the audience and was fighting! Angus came on stage, and although he didn't say anything, everybody calmed down and they finished their set. The Subs were good, but AC/DC were great, building with these riffs until Bon came out and then everything just took off.

"Saxon ended up playing a few shows with AC/DC, right after they'd released *Back In Black*. I was sat backstage telling Malcolm Young how we'd seen them in Sheffield and he thought that was fantastic. They'd got this bar backstage that they were really proud of, and their manager told us they'd booked us just because they wanted to hear 747 (*Strangers In The Night*) live, which was great for us – we'd gone full circle!"

INTERVIEWS: POLLY GLASS, RICH HOBSON

"THEY'RE THIS MYTHOLOGICAL VALHALLA BAND FROM DOWN UNDER"

Reef frontman **Gary Stringer** salutes the genius of *High Voltage*.



"One of the first albums I ever owned was *High Voltage*, and it was on tape cassette. I would have been eleven or twelve. Even now the sound of that record is incredible. The guitar sound that Angus and Malcolm get is golden, and Bon Scott looked like some sort of superhero from a rock'n'roll band of teenage dreams.

He was my first real music hero.

"For me, from those first two songs on *High Voltage* I was hooked. *Rock And Roll Singer* was basically a blueprint for my life. It's one of the first songs I learned to sing. I wanted to follow the instructions, the lyrics, and I did: I left school at sixteen and wanted to be a rock'n'roll singer.

It's *A Long Way To The Top (If You Wanna Rock'N'Roll)* is absolutely perfect. The lyrics are bang on: you've got to keep fighting hard, you've got to believe in what you're doing, and you've got to put the miles in, it's not just two hours on stage.



HIGH VOLTAGE

(Albert/Atlantic, 1976)

And it's got bagpipes in it, right? I mean, who does that?!

"When I listen to *High Voltage* now I remember excitement. They had a spirit of punk about them in the fact that they didn't give a fuck. And it seemed like they'd fight anyone. They're probably absolutely gorgeous guys, I've never met them, but there was that element of excitement, danger and sex, wrapped up in this beautiful guitar sound.

"You've got to mention the rhythm section as well; that's what makes it rock'n'roll, as just opposed to being hard rock. It's got that boogie, it's got that swing. When we got signed, our A&R guys said: 'You get the girls dancing, and that's one of the reasons we signed you.' And that, to me, is what rock'n'roll music is all rooted in. There's definitely sex in it, there's sweat, there's excitement, everything all together.

"I've never seen them live. And in a way I'm alright with that, because to me they're this mythological Valhalla band from Down Under. They are the archetypal rock'n'roll band, they've got that ability to make people move. It's just a fabulous soundtrack to life." 🎧

"IT WAS A RETURN TO FORM"

The Answer's **Cormac Neeson** on *Black Ice*, and talking *Father Ted* with Brian Johnson.



"With the exception of *Back In Black*, I don't think any album could compete with their first four albums. But in terms of how *Black Ice* stacks up against everything they've done I'd say it was a damn fine effort.

"We were on their label, Albert, and we toured with them for a year and

a half. They kicked off every night with *Rock 'N' Roll Train*, which I never heard a single person complain about. They did *War Machine* every night, *Anything Goes*, *Big Jack*. It speaks volumes about how much of a return to form that record was for them.

"The tour started in this big sports arena in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. I remember sitting backstage, getting nervous, and Brian Johnson and Cliff Williams came in and said: 'Lads, you're on this tour for a reason, we're looking forward to seeing you playing, so go out and do us proud.' It was a great pep talk.

"Cliff and Brian came into our dressing room every night just to sink a bottle of wine and chat, like we were old mates down the pub.

"At the end of the run they took us out for dinner and we ate steak, chatting about music and *Father Ted*. On one hand it was the most normal thing in the world, but on the other we were playing to football stadiums." 🎧



BLACK ICE

(Albert/Columbia, 2008)

The *Black Ice*-period AC/DC. That album was a return to form, reckons Neeson.





"BACK IN BLACK IS ON ANOTHER LEVEL"

Kiss frontman and guitarist **Paul Stanley** celebrates the album that turned AC/DC into superstars.



"There's a great quote from Angus Young where somebody said to him: 'This album sounds just like your last one', and he goes: 'No, it sounds like all of our albums!' So I guess you could say it's kind of hard to pick a favourite.

"There are certain songs that I love.

Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap is amazing, and *Highway To Hell* is as nasty and glorious as you can get. But let's be honest, *Back In Black* is on another level.

"When Brian Johnson joined AC/DC, I was curious – like everyone was – about how that would impact the band and the chemistry they had with Bon Scott. But what they created with *Back In Black* was just monumental. The way that album starts with *Hells Bells*, it hit me like the first time I heard Black Sabbath – like, 'Holy shit!' With *Back In Black* the band's sound was polished to some degree. They were building on what they'd done before, moving forward. That kind of bare-bones grit they had in the early days was replaced with this driving sonic overload. But it was so brilliant. I thought what was gained overrode what was lost.

"There's another great song from the beginning of the Brian era. *For Those About To Rock* is as impressive and colossal as anything I've ever heard. The end of that song, with the cannons firing, it really is gladiator music!

"A lot of bands have tried to copy them, but AC/DC are the real deal, and I knew that from the first time I saw them. It was at the Whisky A Go Go in LA, sometime in the mid-seventies. They were so gritty, and the adrenaline level was just crazy. The amount of energy that Angus was expending on stage was mind boggling. I mean, the sweat was just flying off him. You're standing there thinking this man is possessed – like a demonic possession! And Bon had a unique style. He was kind of like the charismatic troublemaker. The kind of guy that everybody would look at and think: 'Boy, I wish I had a mate like that...'

"A little later we took AC/DC out as the opening act for Kiss, and again, they were fantastic. As Angus has said, we made sure they had the best sound, and we always had the same attitude with opening acts. It's cheating to undermine



BACK IN BLACK

(Albert/Atlantic, 1980)

them or sabotage them. If you're the headliner you're supposed to be the champ, but if the champ can only win by having the contender fight with one hand tied behind their back, then you don't deserve to be champion. So that's part of it. And being a huge rock'n'roll fan, I wanted those bands to go out there and be the best they can be. Not only for the audience's sake, but because I want to see them kick ass. Then it's our job to show everyone why we're the headliner. And if we can't do that, that's on us, it's not on them.

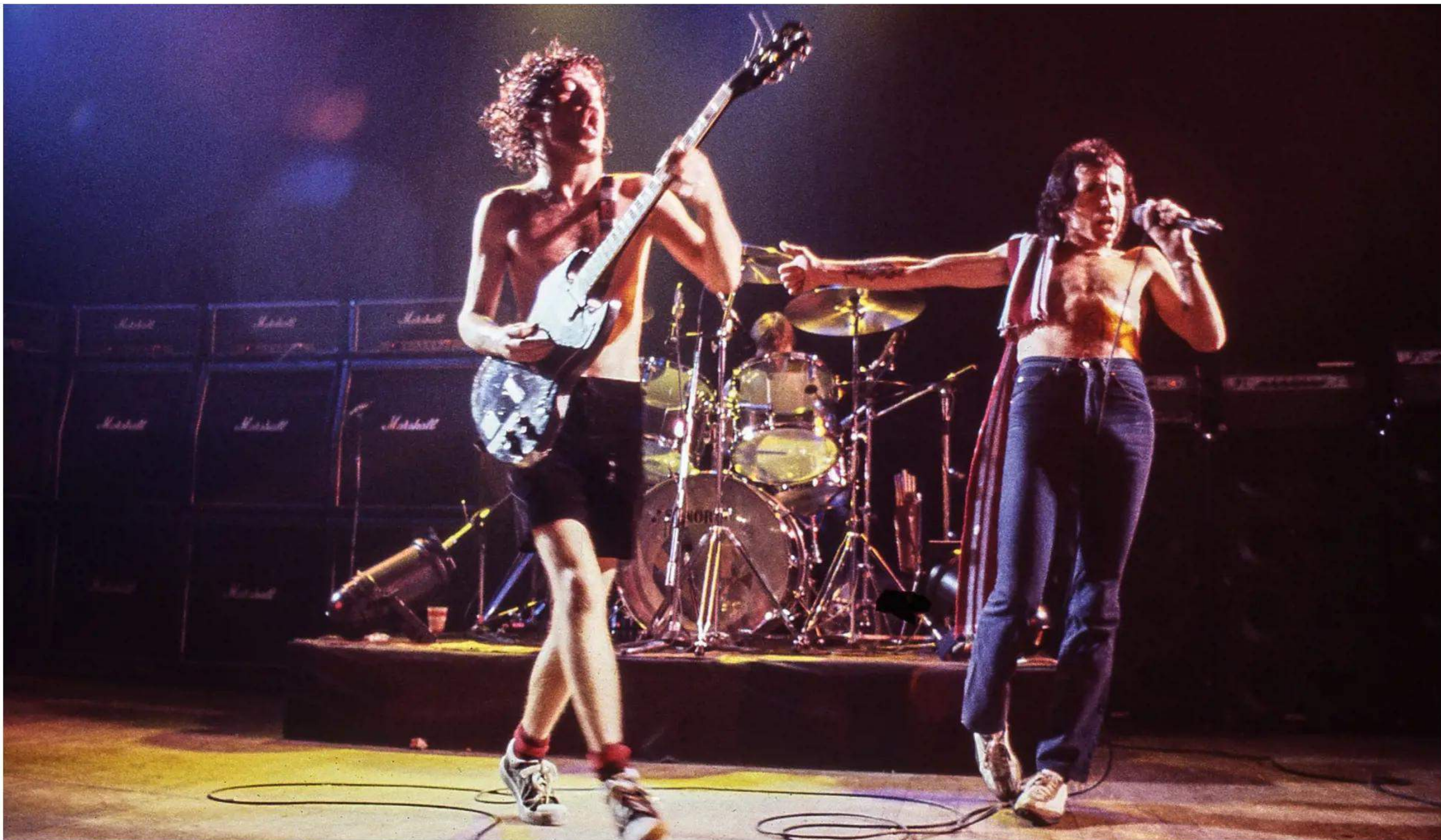
"I also think that what AC/DC have is something that's in all the great classic bands, without any exception. It's that chemistry between two people, that yin and yang and a sense of camaraderie that audiences can relate to. All the great bands have it. It's Roger Daltrey and Pete Townsend. It's Robert Plant and Jimmy Page. It's Ronnie Wood and Rod

Stewart. If you go down the line it's me and Gene, it's Axl and Slash. AC/DC had it with Bon and Angus, and it was the same with Brian and Angus. That yin and yang, it's like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. There's a balance and a chemistry on stage that has a real connection with an audience. I've always said that the key to a great band is to make it a club that everyone wants to be a member of. That camaraderie is a big part of what makes AC/DC so great. And when you listen to *Back In Black* or *Highway To Hell* or any of those classic records, I think you can really feel that chemistry." 🎧



After *Big Balls*, big bells: Brian Johnson with AC/DC in Chicago in 1980.





GEORGE BODNAR ARCHIVE/CONICPIX

"I GOT THE CHILLS THE FIRST TIME I HEARD IT"

King's X frontman **Dug Pinnick** on the magic of *If You Want Blood You've Got It* – and jamming with Brian Johnson.

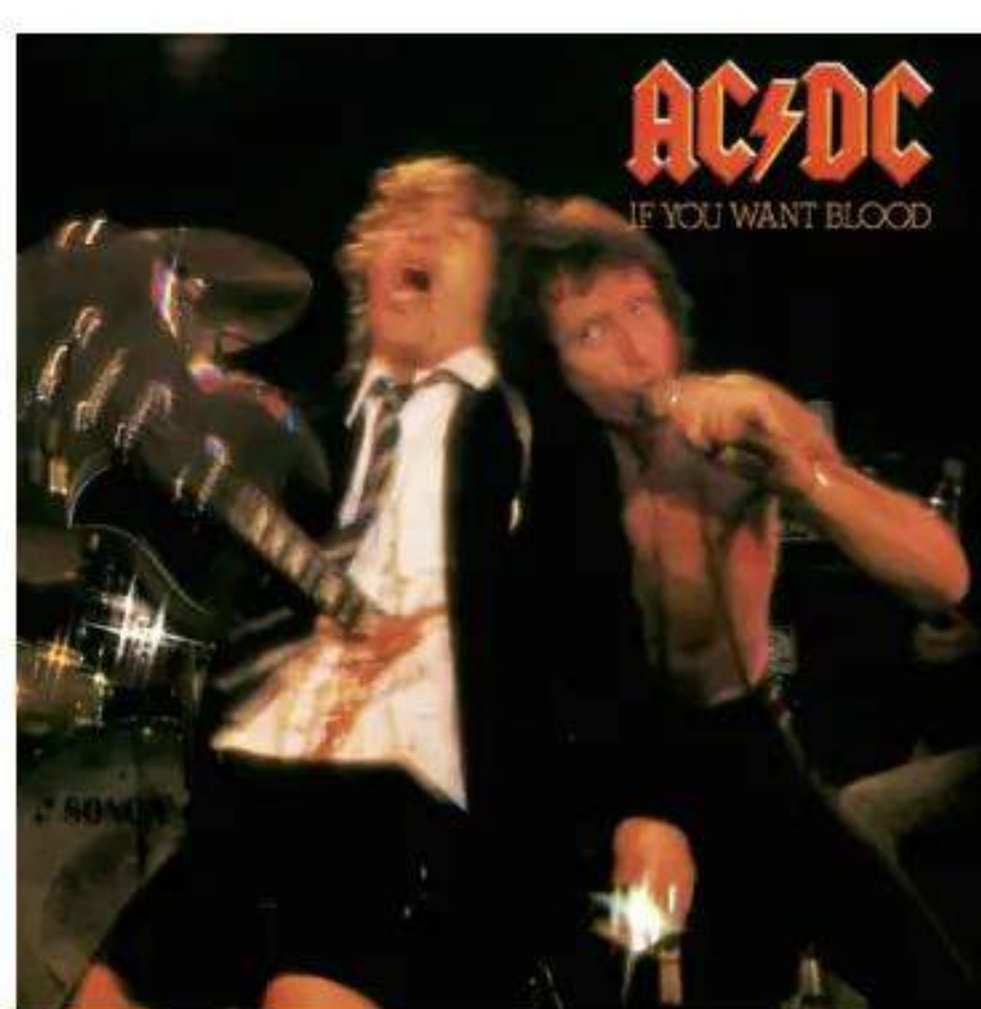


"I remember going into a music store where I lived in the late seventies, and there were two records there: AC/DC's first album and The Police's first album. I said to my friend: 'What's this AC/DC band? What are they like?' And he said: 'Oh they're a punk band.' So I bought the Police record instead. But right after that I saw AC/DC on [US

music TV show] *Don Kirshner's Rock Concert*. They did *Sin City* and my jaw just dropped. They were everything I wanted to hear at that moment. I fell in love with them.

"I remember getting the cassette of *If You Want Blood* when it came out. I put the cassette in and laid in my bed waiting for it start. The crowd noise is perfect, it just starts to build to this crescendo. Then 'pow-pow-pow', they go into *Riff Raff* and my brain is just getting pounded. I remember getting the chills. There's so much power to their music, but so much emotion and nuance as well. They emphasise certain key things that give them a kind of hypnotic presence.

"The thing about live albums back then was that they could be the only chance you got to experience these bands in that situation. Bands didn't come around like they do now, and if they did we didn't always know they were playing. There was no MTV or internet, so unless someone told you they were coming to town you wouldn't have seen them. A live record made your dreams come true in a way. It let



IF YOU WANT BLOOD YOU'VE GOT IT

(Albert/Atlantic, 1978)

Power trip: Angus and Bon on the *Powerage* tour, Bristol, 1978.

you imagine what was going on on stage, and feel the emotion that was happening in that room.

"King's X got to play with AC/DC in the early 1990s, and it was the most wonderful time. I felt like we'd stepped into a Rolls-Royce and were being driven around for four months. Those crowds were tough though. If they like you they like you, if they don't they let you know about it. It was really brutal in Northern Germany – fifteen thousand people with their middle fingers in the air. We'd finish a song and all you'd hear from the crowd would be: 'Angus! Angus!' like on the *If You Want Blood* album. So we'd start the next song and they'd just throw stuff at us: lighters, coins, toilet bowl cleaner... I have no idea where they got this shit. But then you'd look at these people who were giving us the hardest time, and they'd give you a little smile and a thumbs up.

"The band were kind enough to take us out to dinner a couple of times, and we got to hang out with them a little. I remember one time, a couple of the AC/DC guys couldn't make their sound-check, so me and Jerry [Gaskill, King's X drummer] did their sound-check with Brian Johnson singing and a couple of their techs. We ended up playing a few old rock'n'roll tunes.

"Brian used to tell a lot of jokes, and I could never understand what he was saying. I'd ask Angus: 'What did he say?' And Angus said: 'Just laugh, we don't know either.' There was never a serious word that came out of their mouths." 🗨️

INTERVIEWS: DAVE EVERLEY

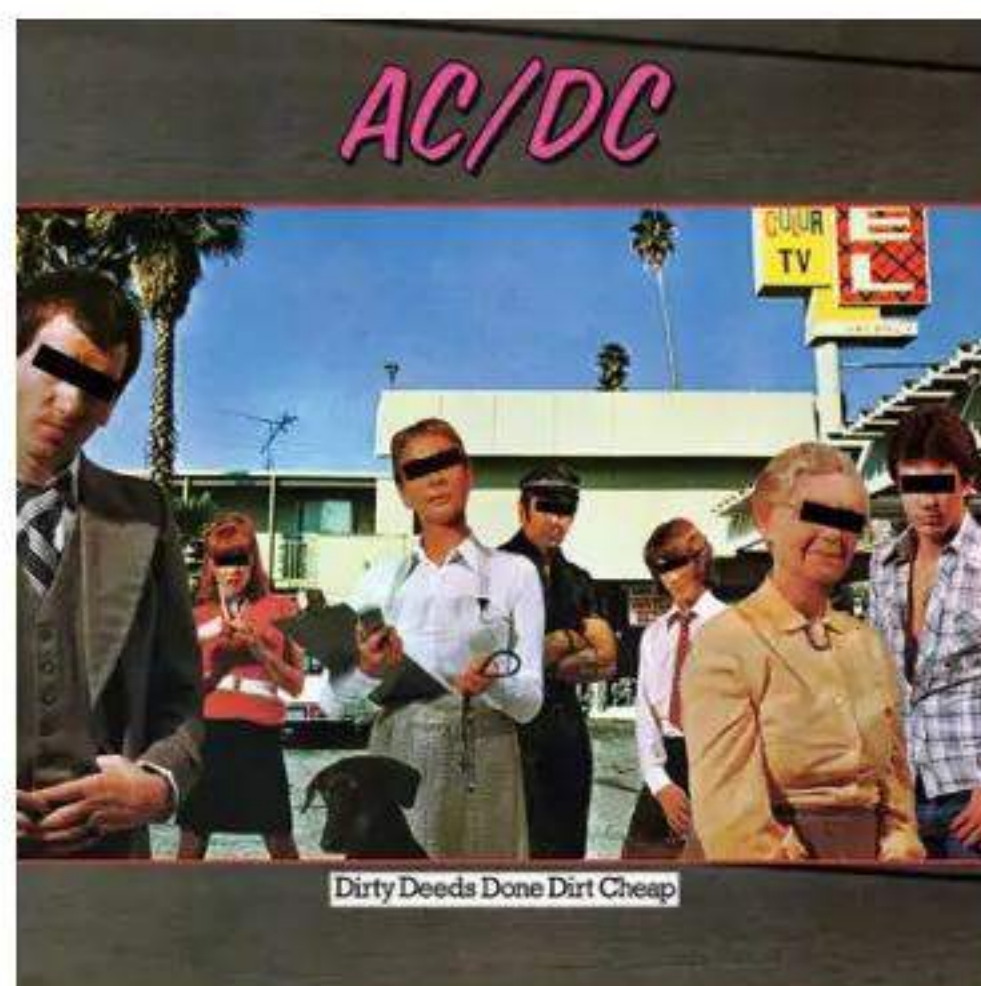
"BIG BALLS MADE MY DAD LAUGH SO HARD"

Wolfgang Van Halen on how he bonded with his dad Eddie over *Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap*.



"This was my introduction to AC/DC and the wonder that is Bon Scott and his unique singing voice. When I was about seven I was on a Winnebago trip with my mom and dad. We were driving to the Grand Canyon. We pulled over somewhere while my mom went to a store or the bathroom, and my dad said: 'Hey, check this out.' And he puts on *Big Balls*. He was laughing so hard, which made me laugh so hard. Dad loved that song. Every time he heard the bit where Bon goes: 'Ooooh...' he just cracked up.

"*Dirty Deeds* is such a great album. It's the one that



DIRTY DEEDS DONE DIRT CHEAP

(1976, Albert/Atlantic)

cemented my love of AC/DC. The title song is fantastic – I love the solo where Angus just hammers on. And *Problem Child* was always a real big song for me. Brian Johnson is a wonderful human being and an incredible singer, but there's just something about Bon Scott. He's got that sleazy, amazing voice that could just never be replicated. That really resonated with me and my dad.

"I only got to meet them as a band once, on the *Black Ice* tour. It was a huge honour, especially to meet Malcolm Young. Malcolm was always my favourite member. I see myself as a rhythm guitar player first and foremost, and he's the greatest rhythm guitar player ever. The groove that man had was untouchable. He was the backbone that made AC/DC what it was." 🗨️



Up to dirty deeds, no doubt:
'DC in July 1976.

MAIN GETTY; WOLFGANG VAN HALEN: TRAVIS SHINN/PRESS

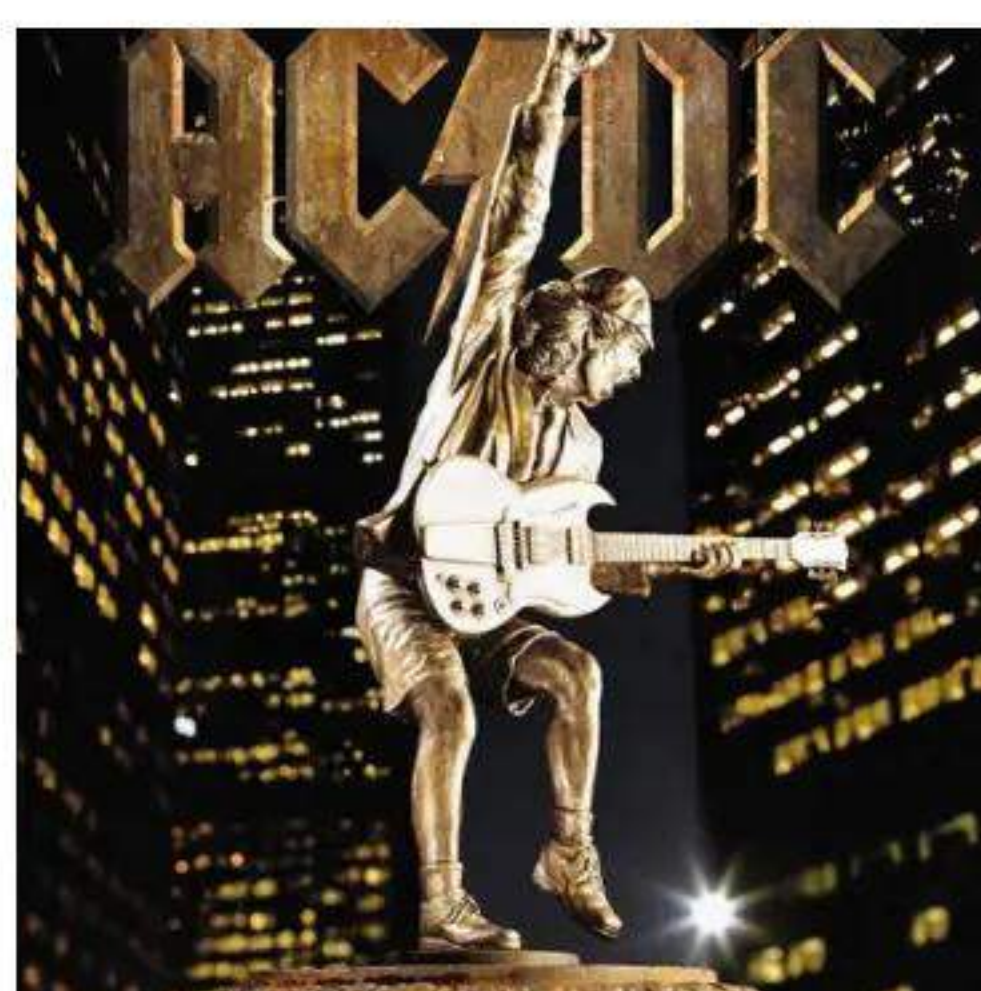
"THEY GOT BACK TO THE ESSENCE"

Stiff Upper Lip is the closest late AC/DC came to a Bon Scott album, according to Warner E Hodges.



"I've seen AC/DC a hundred and five times. A hundred and four times I've paid to get in, I've gotten in free once. They're the reason I play guitar. I was a drummer, but when I saw Angus I wanted in on that. I didn't want to have to sit at the back.

"There was a period where they kind of went to the wilderness and got away from what they did well. They were still great, but every album would have one or two great songs, versus the old days, when pretty much every song was great. But with *Stiff Upper Lip* they got back to the essence of what they were about.



STIFF UPPER LIP

(Albert/East West, 2000)

"First thing, they got [drummer] Phil Rudd back in the band. Chris Slade is a great drummer, but he's a hard rock drummer and AC/DC were a hard rock band when he was there. Phil Rudd always brought the 'and roll'. The groove him and [bassist] Cliff Williams have together is incredible. He's bat-shit crazy, but he's the right drummer for AC/DC.

"Second thing, they had their brother George Young produce it. *Stiff Upper Lip* sounds closer to some of the older AC/DC stuff. The music is great – *Stiff Upper Lip*, *Meltdown*, *House Of Jazz*, *Blues*, *All Screwed Up*, these are great blues-rock songs.

"It might not have the strength of the songs on *Powerage*, but it sounds a lot like *Powerage*. They got as close as they ever did to the old Bon Scott days with *Stiff Upper Lip*." 🗨️



MAIN: ROBERT ALFORD; RICK NIELSEN: KEVIN MAZUR

"HIGHWAY TO HELL IS THE ULTIMATE 'HOWAY THE LADS!' ANTHEM"

Cheap Trick guitarist **Rick Nielsen** on jamming Chuck Berry songs with AC/DC and introducing Bon Scott to Mexican food.



"AC/DC's guy at their label, Atlantic, was the brother of our guy at our label, Epic, which is how I first heard about them. I guess we were both starting to break through around the same time – seventy-five/seventy-six. I heard those early albums and immediately liked them. *Highway To Hell* felt like their shot at the big time.

The song *Highway To Hell* itself is the perfect 'Howay the lads!' anthem. It's a great, great record.

"Cheap Trick played with AC/DC a lot in the late seventies. We did flip-flops – sometimes we headlined, sometimes they headlined. They were just so good – the only band where I watched every show every night. There was no funny stuff, they weren't trying to be something they weren't. The guitars were perfect, the rhythm was perfect, the singing was perfect. They were a bar band, but better than any bar band I've ever seen. The ultimate bar band.

"Angus and Malcolm weren't trying to be flash, they weren't doing the shenanigans a lot of other guitarists were doing at the time. I'm not pretty when it comes to playing guitar, and neither are those guys. And Phil Rudd is the perfect drummer.

"We played with AC/DC on July 4, 1979 in Illinois, forty thousand people or something there. The next day I took Angus and Malcolm over to this big house from 1854 I'd bought in Rockford, Illinois, just because I love designing



HIGHWAY TO HELL

(Albert/Atlantic, 1980)

Dirty deeds done dirt Cheap:
Rick Nielsen trades licks
with the Youngs in '79.

things and doing it up. They couldn't believe it. They'd only ever seen me playing guitar on stage, and now I'm taking them around this house I was rehabbing. Every time I'd see them afterwards, they'd go: 'Hey Rick, you still living in Rockford?'

"I've never seen AC/DC jam with anybody else before, but they got up with us one time to do *Johnny B Goode* [at the Sioux Falls Arena in Sioux Falls, South Dakota on July 7, 1979]. I can't remember exactly how it happened, but I gave Angus a guitar, and Bon and Robin [Zander, Cheap Trick frontman] were switching lines.

"Bon was a pirate. He had the snarl, he had the attitude, he had the tough-guy appearance, but he had a wink in his eye too. He reminded me of Alex Harvey, who had the same thing going on. I guess it must have been a Scottish thing. They were the kind of guys you'd see drinking and fighting on the docks on a Friday night. I was the first person to ever take Bon out for Mexican food. He'd never tried it before. I remember he had tacos and Scotch. The same day that Bon died, there was a fire at the house I'd bought that Angus and Malcolm came to. The house burnt down, but I cared more about Bon than the building.

"I'm jumping forward, but a few years ago I flew to Nashville to see them. They had all these country people who wanted to come meet them, but they didn't want anybody backstage. But they knew us and gave us passes. When Angus and Malcolm came in the room they said: 'Hey Rick, you still living in Rockford?' I love those guys." **🔥**

INTERVIEWS: DAVE EVERLEY

"PEOPLE ASSUMED THEY WERE DONE"

Massive Wagons' **Baz Mills** on *Power Up*, the AC/DC album no one thought we'd get.



"I got into AC/DC when I was a kid. One of my dad's mates recorded a load of their albums on to cassette for me. The first time I saw them live was on the *Black Ice* tour. I saw the four times on that tour in the end. We were just mad for it.

"Everybody was excited when things started appearing in

magazines a couple of years ago, with the neon sign and the lightning flash: was it a new AC/DC tour? Was it a new album? I think because of what happened with Malcolm, people assumed they were done, but you just can't keep them down.

"Then they came out with *Shot In The Dark*, which was



POWER UP

(Columbia, 2020)

absolutely the best song they could have come back with – it's just a banging tune.

"We all know what we're getting with an AC/DC album after all this time, but there's still a magic to it. And *Power Up* was a great album, especially because no one thought we'd get another AC/DC record. *Kick You When You're Down* and *Demon Fire* are great, but *Through The Mists Of Time* is a brilliant song. Lyrically it's kind of an emotional, nostalgia song, which you don't normally get with AC/DC.

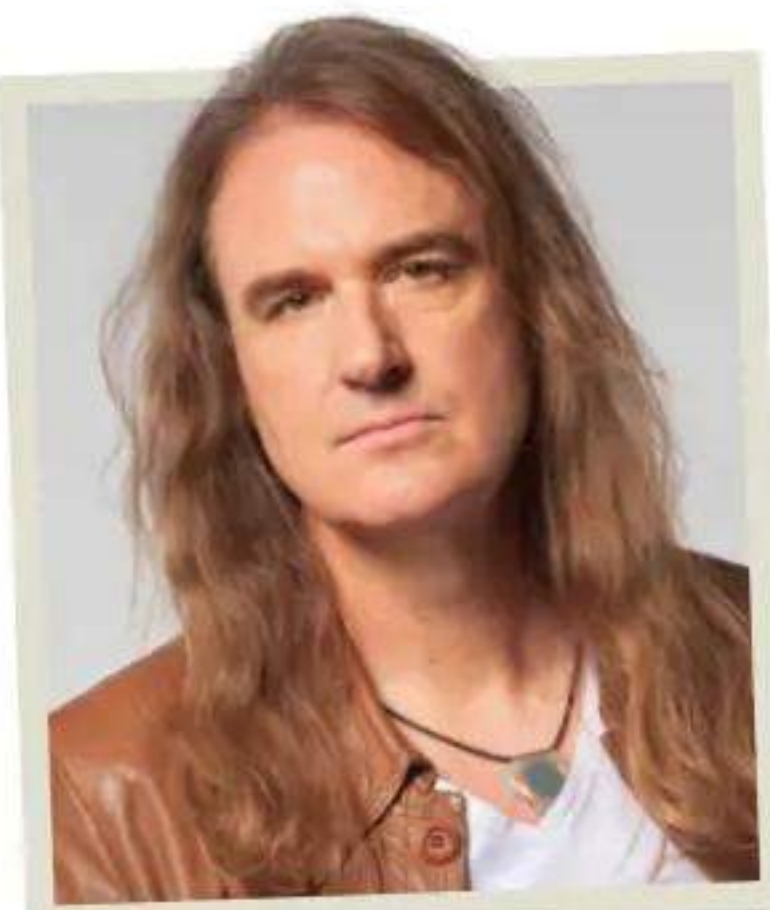
"Of course they miss Malcolm, but no one's going to haul them up in front of a jury because they carried on without him. He put a shift in, that guy. And they replaced him with someone that was related and who had stood in for Malcolm before [Angus and Malcolm's nephew, Stevie Young]. That was a class move, but they're a class band." 🗣️



Still got the Power:
AC/DC in 2020.

"AC/DC HAD BECOME EVERYBODY'S BAND"

Ex-Megadeth bassist **David Ellefson** on an album that had to follow a monster.

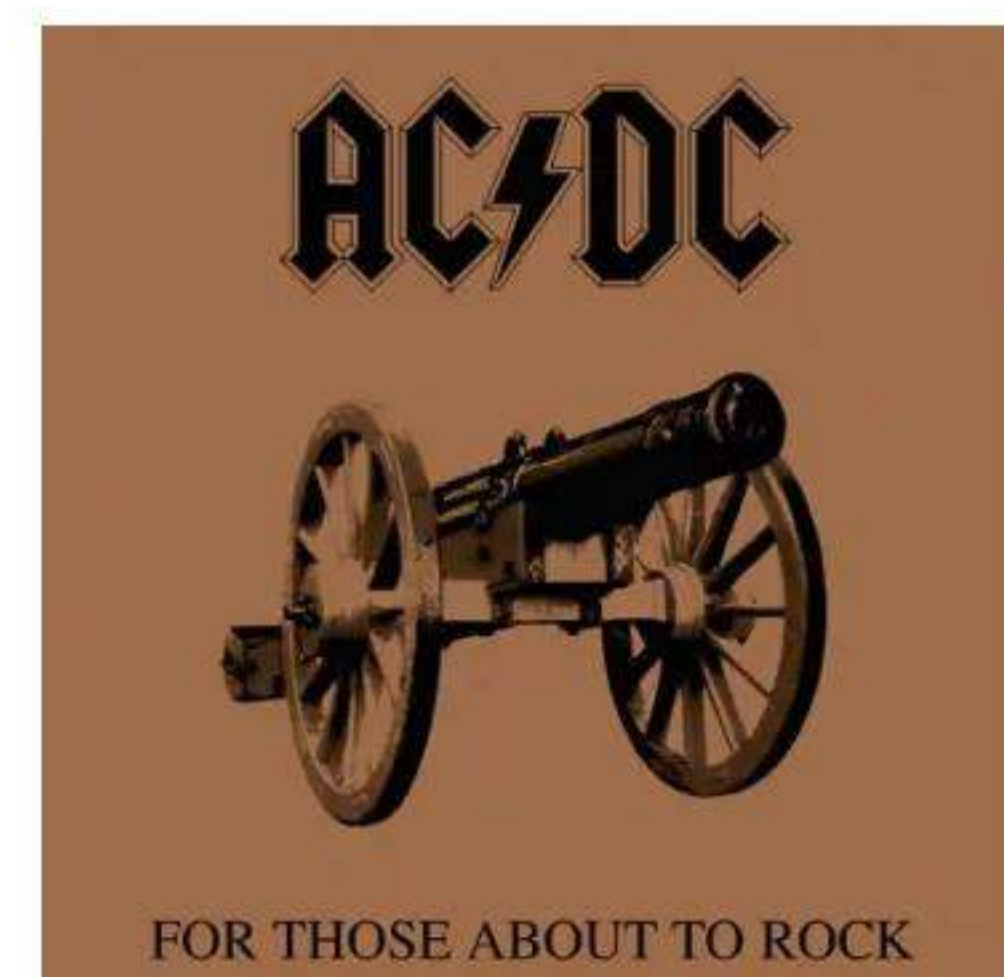


"A buddy of mine saw AC/DC play *Sin City* on *Midnight Special*, which was a really popular late TV show, and he was raving about it. Within a few days I'd picked up *If You Want Blood* from a local record store. Then not long after that I went to see Cheap Trick play in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and I had

no idea that AC/DC were supporting them. It was like, 'Holy shit!' It's the only show I've ever been at the front for.

"They're one of the few bands to have changed singers and become even bigger – Van Halen are probably the only other band I can think of. *Back In Black* was a great record, and it was the soundtrack to all the keg parties.

"I've got to be honest, *For Those About To Rock* felt like they were stagnating a little. The title song is a classic, but suddenly they felt like everybody else's band; all the other kids in high school were going to see them now. *Back In Black* had turned them into a superstar band, and *For Those About To Rock* kept them there, but I think it suffers from being in the shadow of *Black In Black*." 🗣️



FOR THOSE ABOUT TO ROCK

(Albert/Atlantic, 1981)



"IT ISN'T ROCKET SCIENCE. IT'S PURE ROCK'N'ROLL"

Def Leppard's **Joe Elliott** on the genius of AC/DC's *Powerage* – and why he still owes Bon Scott a tenner.



AC/DC made so many great records, but for me *Powerage* is unbeatable. *Highway To Hell* is a great record. *Back In Black* is an unbelievable record. But it was a different kind of production on those albums. Those were studio records, whereas *Powerage* really captured how the band sounded live.

"It's also the best-sounding record they made with Harry Vanda and George Young producing. It's got that live-in-the-studio feel, but it's also more powerful than *Let There Be Rock* or *Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap*. And unlike *Let There Be Rock*, most of *Powerage* is actually in tune!

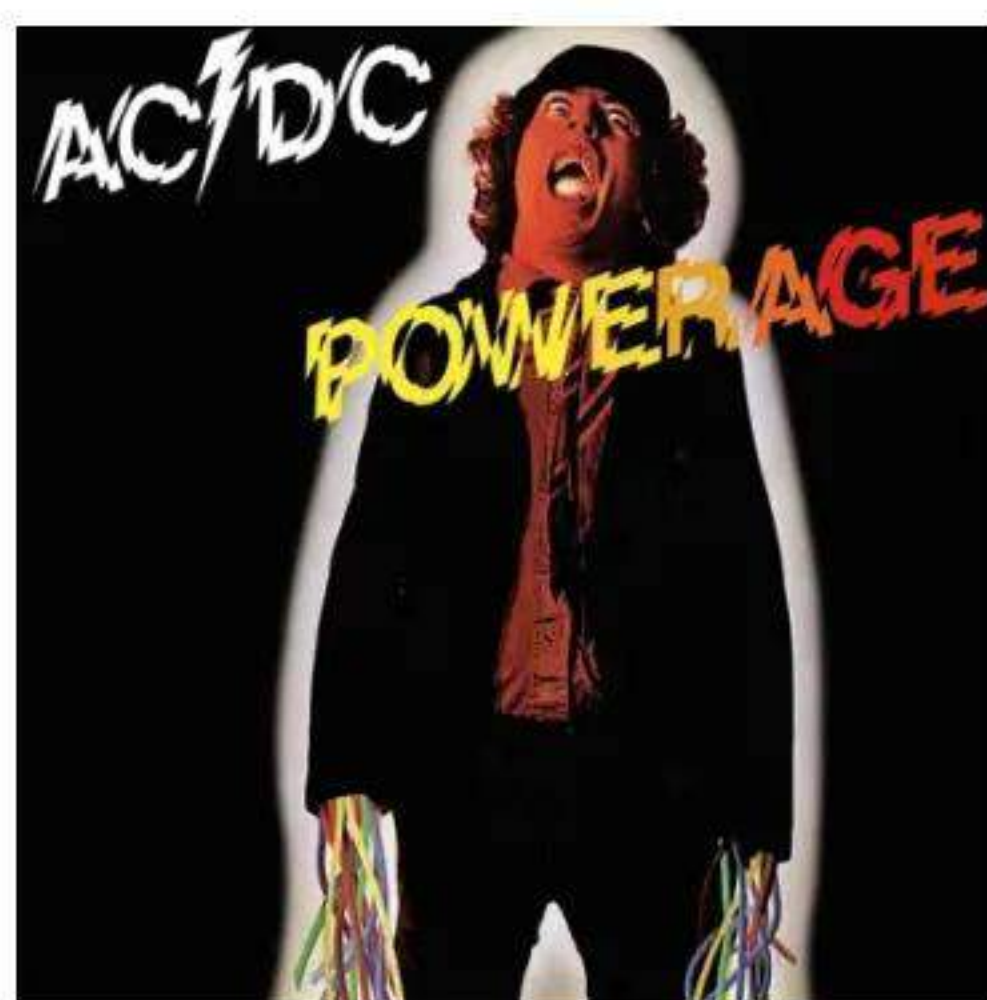
"There are so many great songs on *Powerage*. *Rock And Roll Damnation* – or *Rock And Roll Dalmatian*, as we used to call it – is a brilliant opener. And then you've got *Riff Raff*, *Sin City*, *Gimme A Bullet*, *Down Payment Blues*. ... I would shoot my own mother... well, no, I wouldn't, but I would do something drastic to be able to write those kinds of songs. Stunning, absolutely stunning – the whole record.

"The intro to *Down Payment Blues* is incredible. It's kind of subtle for AC/DC, and beautifully done. I'd say that intro is right up there with *Live Wire*, which is pretty hard to beat.

"One of the really deep cuts that I love is *What's Next To The Moon*. The way Bon sings: 'I tied my baby to the railroad tracks...' Nobody wrote lyrics like Bon's. The guy had the greatest gruff, soulful voice and the best sense of humour that any singer has ever had. He was one of the boys, and you wanted to hang out with a guy like that. And, thank god, I did for three weeks back in seventy-nine when Def Leppard opened for AC/DC. Bon lent me a tenner and I never got the chance to pay him back. When we were in Australia one time I visited his home town, where they have a statue of him. I felt I owed it to his memory.

"Some of Bon's best stuff is on *Powerage*: the story of the junkie girlfriend in *Gone Shootin'*, the stuff about being on the dole in *Down Payment Blues*, and all the great lines in *Sin City* – 'Bring on the dancing girls and put the champagne on ice!' Fantastic.

"We used to play *Sin City* when we first started gigging. We'd play that and *Problem Child*. And again, it's the intro to *Sin City* that really hits



POWERAGE

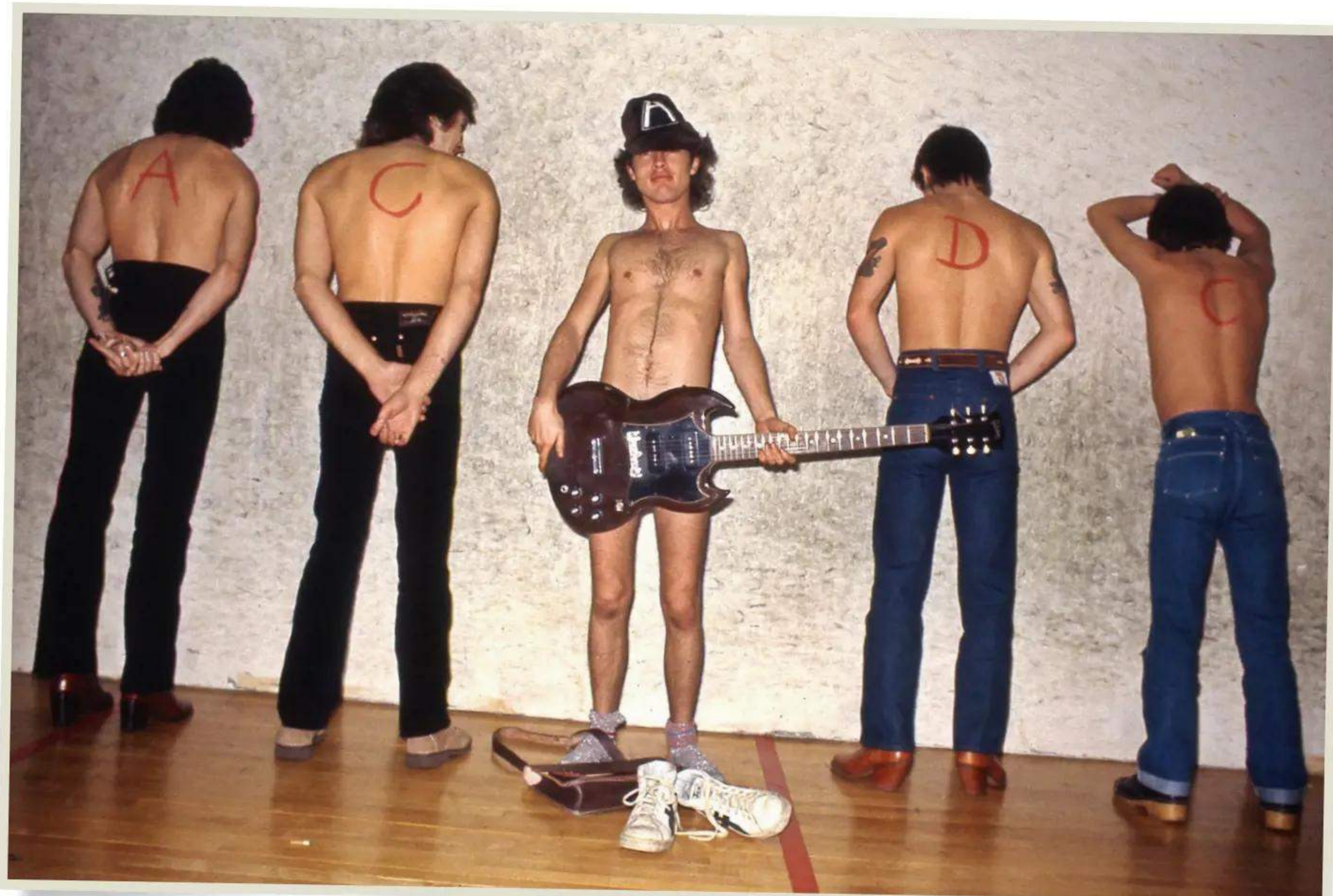
(Albert/Atlantic, 1978)

Like AC/DC here, their music is often stripped to the basics.

home. That four-chord turnaround – bang, bang, bang bang! Just so fucking cool.

"Lots of bands have tried to copy AC/DC but none of them ever got close. What you hear on *Powerage* is simply a great band with a great dynamic. Phil Rudd is one of the greatest rock drummers of all time. The rhythm in that band is stunning – Phil, Cliff Williams on bass and Malcolm Young on rhythm guitar. When I saw them live I loved the way that Malcolm and Cliff would stay close to the back line on stage and just keep it all together. It was like: there's no ego there. So they'd hang back while Angus was doing all his histrionics. And then you'd have Bon standing there, just being the coolest guy ever. They had the perfect balance. I don't think that Malcolm ever wanted to play solos. He was happy to just be the guy that just held down the beat.

"AC/DC just had that thing that other bands never had. I hate the phrase 'the X factor', because the TV show has ruined it, but that's what AC/DC had. They had that extra bit of magic that other bands crave. But you've either got it or you haven't. You can't manufacture it. UFO had it with Schenker. Thin Lizzy had it with the classic line-up with Brian Robertson and Scott Gorham. And AC/DC absolutely had it when they made *Powerage*. There's a good reason why Keith Richards thinks this is one of the best records ever made. As they say, it ain't rocket science. It's pure rock'n'roll. But it's so fucking good!"

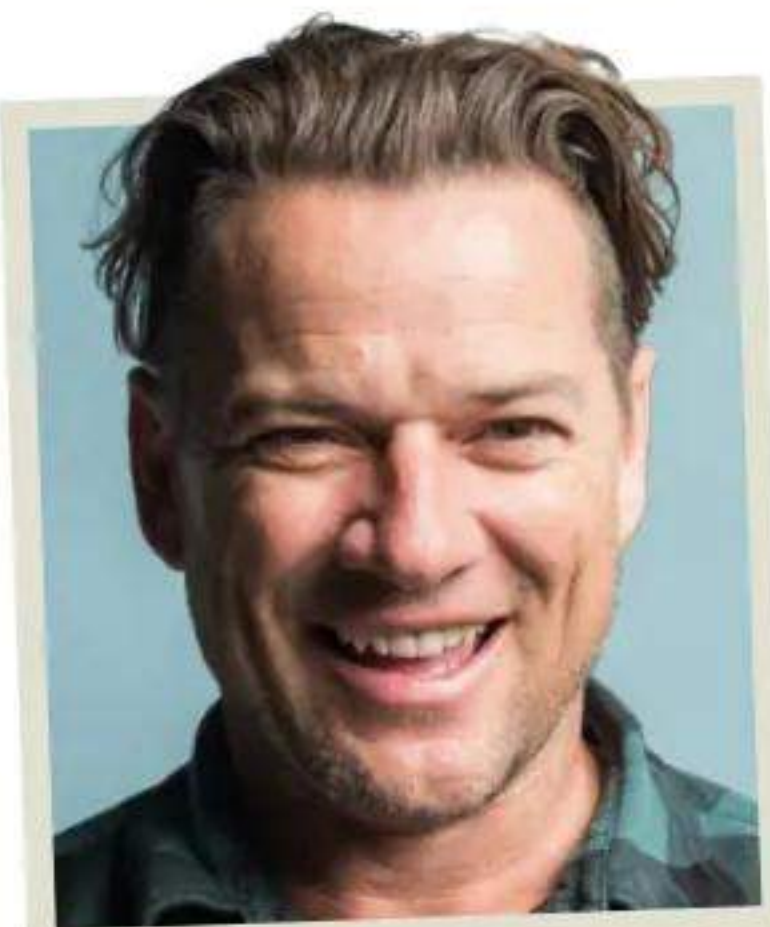




MAIN: GETTY; WHITFIELD CRANE; KEVIN NIXON

"BON SCOTT WAS LIKE A STEINWAY PIANO"

Ugly Kid Joe's **Whitfield Crane** bows down before *Let There Be Rock*.

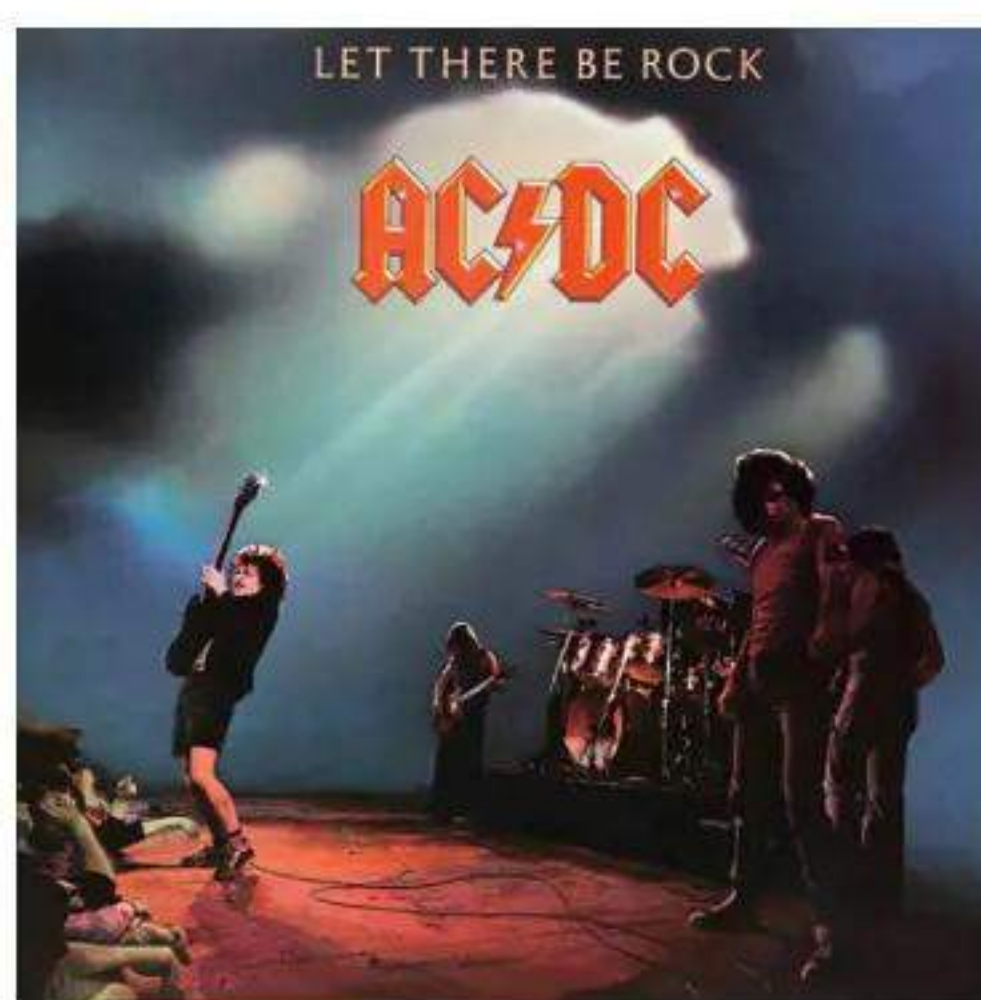


"My sister is four years my senior, and when she left for college she handed me copies of AC/DC's *Highway To Hell* and Lynyrd Skynyrd's *Street Survivors* on vinyl. She said: 'You'll be done with these by junior year in high school.' Little did she know that it was a big open door that I was about to step through

into the world of rock'n'roll.

"I became an AC/DC fanatic. *Back In Black* was the big one, of course, but I went all the way back through their entire catalogue, to things like '74 *Jailbreak* [EP]. I was such a Bon Scott fanatic that I even got obsessed with the bands he was in before AC/DC, like Fraternity and The Valentines.

"*Let There Be Rock* was such a pivotal album. It basically kept them going at a time when it was make or break from them. And the songs on it are just the shit. I could listen to *Bad Boy Boogie* over and over, I love it so much. *Problem Child*—I'm fifty-five now, but I still identify with it just as much as I did when I first heard it as a young teenager. *Hell Ain't A Bad Place To Be*, *Let There Be Rock*, *Whole Lotta Rosie*. . . I can sing you the lyrics for all of these songs without even checking my phone.



LET THERE BE ROCK

(Albert/Atlantic, 1977)

Hooray for Hollywood: Bon and co take California in 1977.

"Bon Scott was one of the reasons I became a singer, along with Ozzy and Rob Halford. One day when I was trying to learn how to become a singer, I was listening to Bon scream his blues runs and I had this epiphany: he's never out of tune. Not once. He's a powerhouse singer, but there's passion and subtlety. I thought, 'Oh my god, this guy is like a Steinway piano—he was always perfectly in tune.'

"I've been lucky enough to get to know Ozzy, who is another inspiration to me. One time I was sitting there with him and I thought: 'I'm going to ask him about Bon Scott.' I said: 'Hey, Ozzy, did you know Bon?' And his eyes just rolled back and he said: 'He was a *drinker*.' He told me about this time he was with them just before they were about to go on stage. He watched Bon drink two pints of some kind of liquid. Ozzy was curious what it was. It turned out it was straight whisky. Bon was a dude who could drink at the highest level, function at the highest level, write street poetry at the highest level and live at the highest level. He was inside life's matrix, and he embraced everything it had to offer.

"AC/DC knocked me on my ass when I was a kid, and changed how I saw things and felt things. I still feel the same way today." 🎸

INTERVIEWS: DAVE EVERLEY, POLLY GLASS



MAIN: GETTY; DANKO JONES: DUSTIN RABIN/PRESS

"I'M PUZZLED WHY PEOPLE SHIT ON IT"

Danko Jones mounts a defence of AC/DC's least-loved album, *Fly On The Wall*.

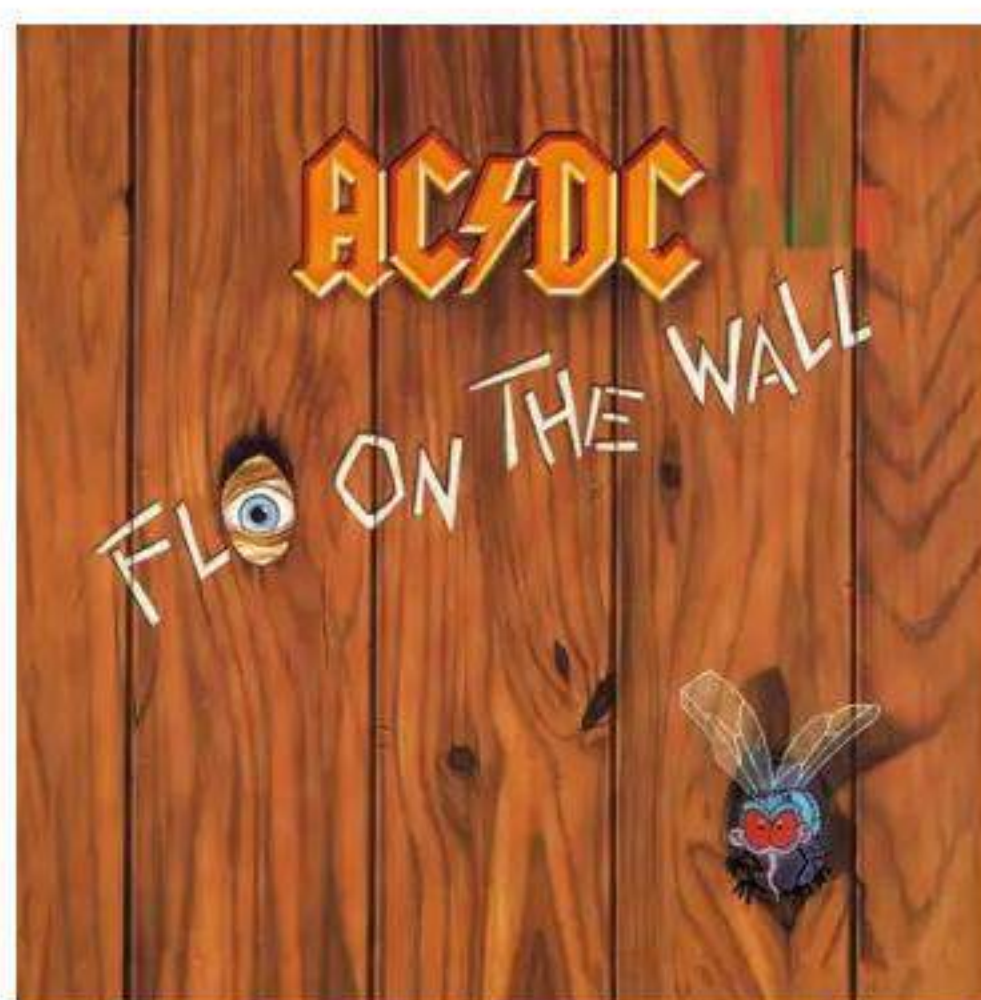


"Fly On The Wall sticks with me because that was the album they were promoting when MuchMusic, the video station – which is like the MTV of Canada – became free on cable for everyone. Literally overnight everybody had MuchMusic, so everyone at school was watching these videos; it just wasn't, you know, the one lucky kid

whose parents gave him everything. Before, we would watch it, and you could hear the music, but the screen was scrambled. Suddenly now you can see everything. It was like getting the keys to Valhalla. And AC/DC, if memory serves me correctly, were promoting *Fly On The Wall*, so I saw the videos for *Shake Your Foundations* and *Sink The Pink*.

"I think *Shake Your Foundations* and *Sink The Pink* are two of the best songs they've ever written. They're the best songs on that album. And, truth be told, not on this latest [Danko Jones] album, but maybe six or seven of our eleven studio albums, I listened to *Shake Your Foundations* and *Sink The Pink* every single time before I started to write riffs. I'm chasing those two songs. I want to write a song like *Shake Your Foundations* – the 'I, aye, aye, that part is like... oh my god! It's so simple, but for some reason it hits me pretty hard.

"I am puzzled by why people shit on that album. I don't get it. It's a pretty strong record. All I kept reading was: 'Oh, it's cookie cutter' – that was the term people used to describe



FLY ON THE WALL

(Albert/Atlantic, 1985)

this album. And it's like, AC/DC is a cookie-cutter band. That's what every band should strive to be. You want to have a signature sound. You want to be identified in five seconds or less. Motörhead, Slayer, AC/DC, Ramones, those four bands, in terms of hard rock and hard music, that's what we are trying to be.

"Angus once name-dropped Danko Jones in an interview, and I was not surprised, because I knew the back story. In 2002 there's this kid who came up to us at the merch booth, and he said: 'Angus Young is my uncle'. We saw him at two shows, and he said: 'I asked my uncle to teach me how to play *Sound Of Love* off [Danko Jones album] *Born A Lion*.' It was just so specific you had to believe it. And sure enough, when that interview came out, he [Angus] named-dropped us. I was so happy that he did, because I had this story that I was telling people for over ten years, like: 'We met Angus Young's nephew, and according to him Angus taught him how to play *Sound Of Love*!' *Sound Of Love* was based on two songs off *Back In Black*, so I was like, well, if anyone could play it, it's Angus Young.

"We collided with them at a Junos – which is like the Grammys of Canada – after-party. And Phil Rudd, Malcolm Young and Angus Young were all there just hanging out. There was no award they were being given, I think they just happened to be there. And they ushered them in, and we took photos with them... and I can't find the fucking photo! I don't even like thinking about it, because I had it!"

No flies on this lot: backstage at the LA Forum in 1985.



Blowin' up their video: filming the *Thunderstruck* promo at Brixton Academy, 1990.

MAIN: GETTY; JOEL O'KEEFE: JOHN McDURRIE/PRESS

"THUNDERSTRUCK IS THE GREATEST SONG EVER WRITTEN"

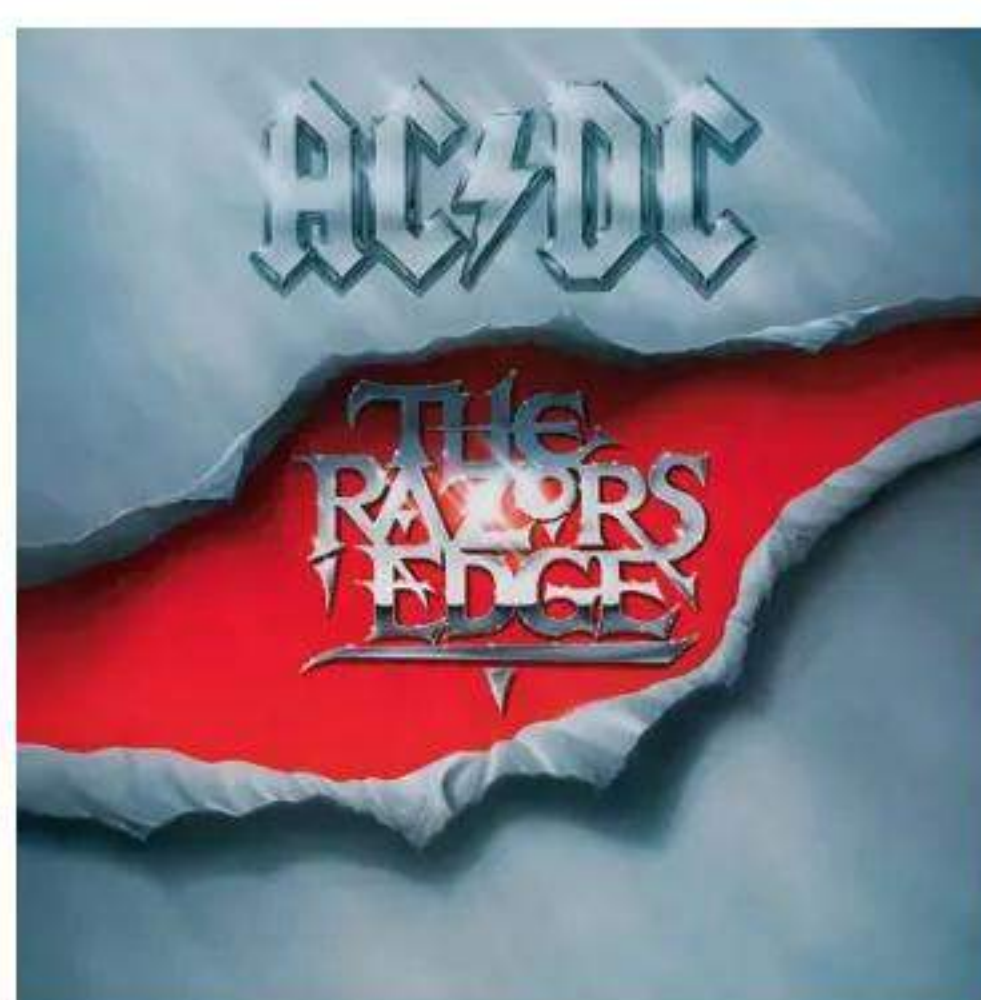
Airbourne frontman **Joel O'Keeffe** on the underrated 1990s one-two punch of *The Razors Edge* and *Ballbreaker*.



"**T**he *Razors Edge* wasn't just the first AC/DC album I bought, it was the first album full-stop. I must have been six years old, and I saw the video for *Thunderstruck* on a music channel we had in Australia called Rage, and I was just transfixed. I waited until it came back on, and sat and recorded it on the VHS player so I could play it over and over again.

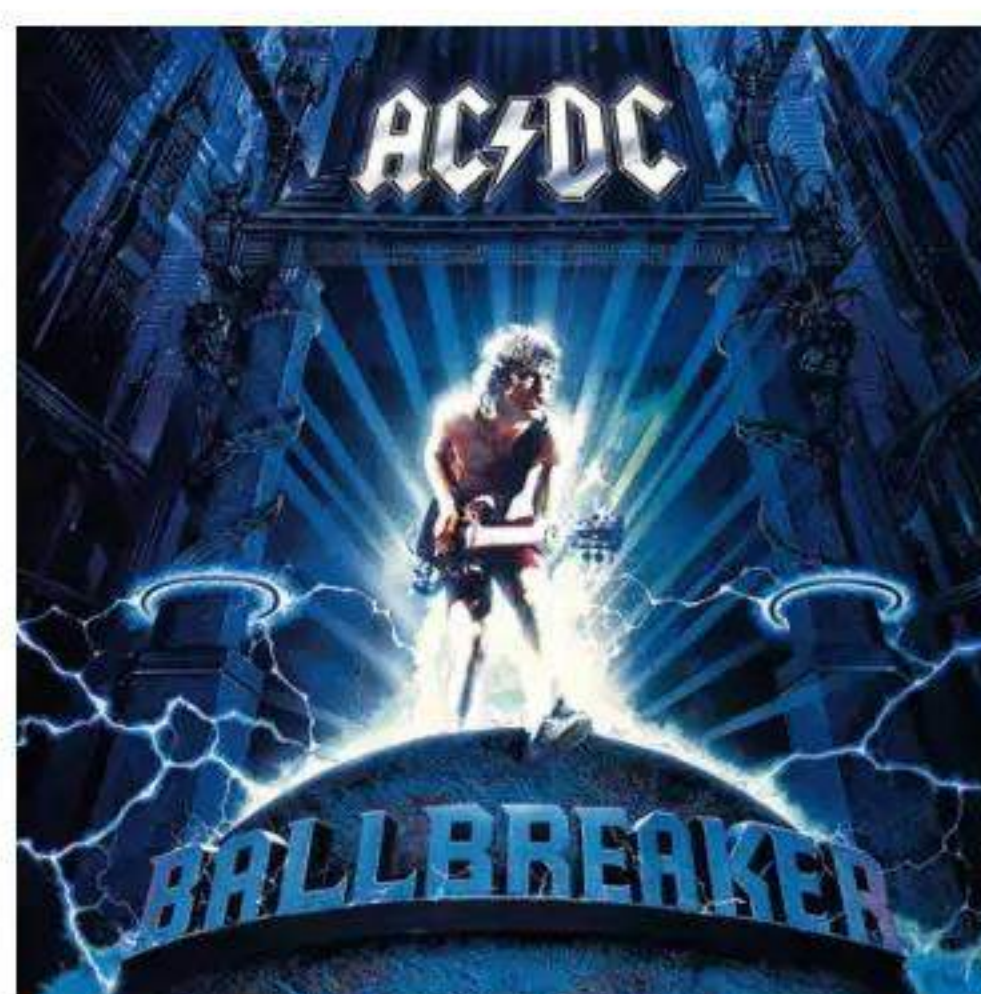
"I got *The Razors Edge* on tape, and a bluey singlet [sleeveless T-shirt] like the one Brian Johnson wore. But I didn't know whether I wanted to be Brian or Malcolm or Angus. I even wanted to shave my head at one point to look like [then-drummer] Chris Slade. My mum just went: 'You're not doing that.'

"Even now, if I'm in a pub and *Thunderstruck* comes on, I'm up for it – 'Let's fucking go!' That's the power it has on me. It's the most streamed AC/DC song of all, bigger than *Back In Black* or *You Shook Me All Night Long*, and there's a reason for that: it's the greatest song ever written. No one has written a stadium anthem like that. If you're watching a sports game and your team runs out to *Thunderstruck*, that's it – your blood is just pumping. That song gets me so pumped up that it could make me jump off a cliff: 'Fuck it, I'll figure out what I'm gonna do before I hit the ground.'



THE RAZORS EDGE

(Albert/Atco, 1990)



BALLBREAKER

(Albert/EastWest, 1995)

"No one goes to AC/DC for their musical complexity. You go to them to rock, and *The Razors Edge* does that from start to finish. *Rock Your Heart* – just listen to those twin guitars. I would play it so loud as kid. *Moneytalks* is such a brilliant single. It's got a country twang to it. Even *Mistress For Christmas* – I have to play that every Christmas Day. People go: 'Really?' Yeah, really.

"The first time I saw them live was in Melbourne on the *Ballbreaker* tour [in '96], the one with the big wrecking ball. *Ballbreaker* is another of my favourite albums, and another really underrated AC/DC record. *The Razors Edge* has a big production, it's very slick, but Rick Rubin produced *Ballbreaker* and it's incredibly raw – everything is stripped back to the bone. It's a much more bluesy album, particularly Angus's solos. If you want to learn one of his solos, you don't need the tablature, just listen to the record. Plus it's got the loudest kick drum ever recorded. It's this low, heavy-sounding record.

"As a kid growing up in the 1990s, AC/DC were big but they weren't cool. But Australia's always had a weird relationship with them. They had to leave and become successful overseas before Australia went: 'Oh, wait, they're our band.' Malcolm once said something like: 'Australia's a great country, but when it comes to rock'n'roll it can get fucked.' That's exactly how I feel. Coming up as a band in Australia, the first thing you want to do is get the fuck out."

INTERVIEWS: DAVE EVERLEY

"THEY KNEW PEOPLE DIDN'T WANT AC/DC TO END"

Tyler Bryant of The Shakedown on opening for AC/DC on the *Rock Or Bust* tour.



"I knew from the first time I heard AC/DC, when I was nine, at one of my schoolfriend's houses that they were a great band. It's about attitude, simplicity and fun. They know how to ride that line between being cool and just having a good time. When you listen to *Rock Or Bust* it makes you want to hold your beer

up in the air and spill it on the guy next to you while you're singing at the top of your lungs. It's party music.

"When we got to open for them on the *Rock Or Bust* tour [in 2016], we'd pretty much been given three shows to audition – if Angus liked us we could do the rest of the tour.



ROCK OR BUST

(Columbia, 2014)

We did the first show in Tacoma, had a great time. We did the the next show in Vegas, and then the third show in Fargo. But we hadn't heard anything, so we just went to the fourth show. We didn't know what was happening, so we stopped someone in the corridor. He went: 'Oh, they didn't tell you? Angus made up his mind after the first night that you guys were gonna get the tour.'

"That was the first tour they did without Malcolm, but everything felt respectful to what he'd built. They knew people didn't want AC/DC to end, because it meant so much to people. It was the same when they got Axl in to sing in place of Brian [on the *Rock Or Bust* tour in 2016]. AC/DC is almost bigger than the band members. It's a way of life." 🎧



Life without Malcolm: the *Rock Or Bust* AC/DC.



"THEY WEREN'T CAVING IN TO TRENDS"

Podcaster and AC/DC expert **Kurt Squiers** on why you're wrong to hate *Flick Of The Switch* and *Blow Up Your Video*.



"I truly believe that AC/DC's *Flick Of The Switch* is a direct result of Malcolm Young pulling back the reigns on a band that had become shot into the stratosphere into a galaxy they simply weren't ready for. Call it self-sabotage, if you like.

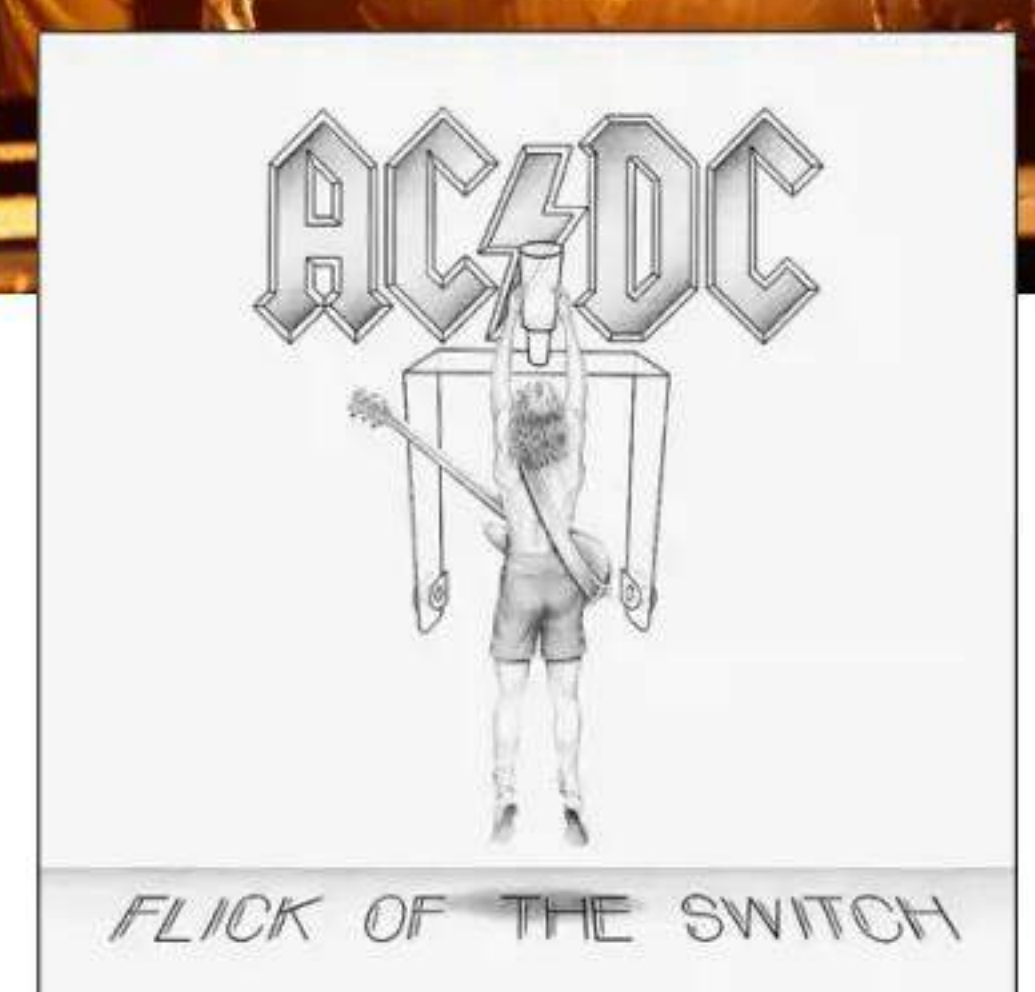
"Heavily influenced by Johnny

Winter's production of Muddy Water's *Hard Again*, the songs had few hooks, but all energy. It's hard, no-frills, as blunt as the album's cover – a simple line drawing of Angus Young on a plain white cover. What *Flick Of The Switch* does achieve is a band staying true to its roots, filled with blistering tracks like *Brain Shake* and *Landslide* rocking out as hard as AC/DC has ever done, and relentlessly not caving into trends.

"By contrast, *Blow Up Your Video* was the result of a band that was succumbing to a decade of decadence. Malcolm had begun to lose his battle with the bottle and was running on fumes, while Brian Johnson was on the verge of a divorce.

"What *Blow Up Your Video* has going for it is the return of original AC/DC producers Harry Vanda and George Young, who brought focus and crafty songwriting back into the fold. From the guitar-jamming *Heatseeker* to the pile-driving rocker *This Means War*, there's no reason toes shouldn't be tapping here. Unreleased tracks like *Borrowed Time* and *Down On The Borderline* would prove to be stronger than other tracks that made it to the final album.

"*Blow Up Your Video* is no classic, but like all AC/DC albums it's fun —plain and simple. Plus I like to say that if you don't like any particular AC/DC album, then you really don't love AC/DC." 🎧



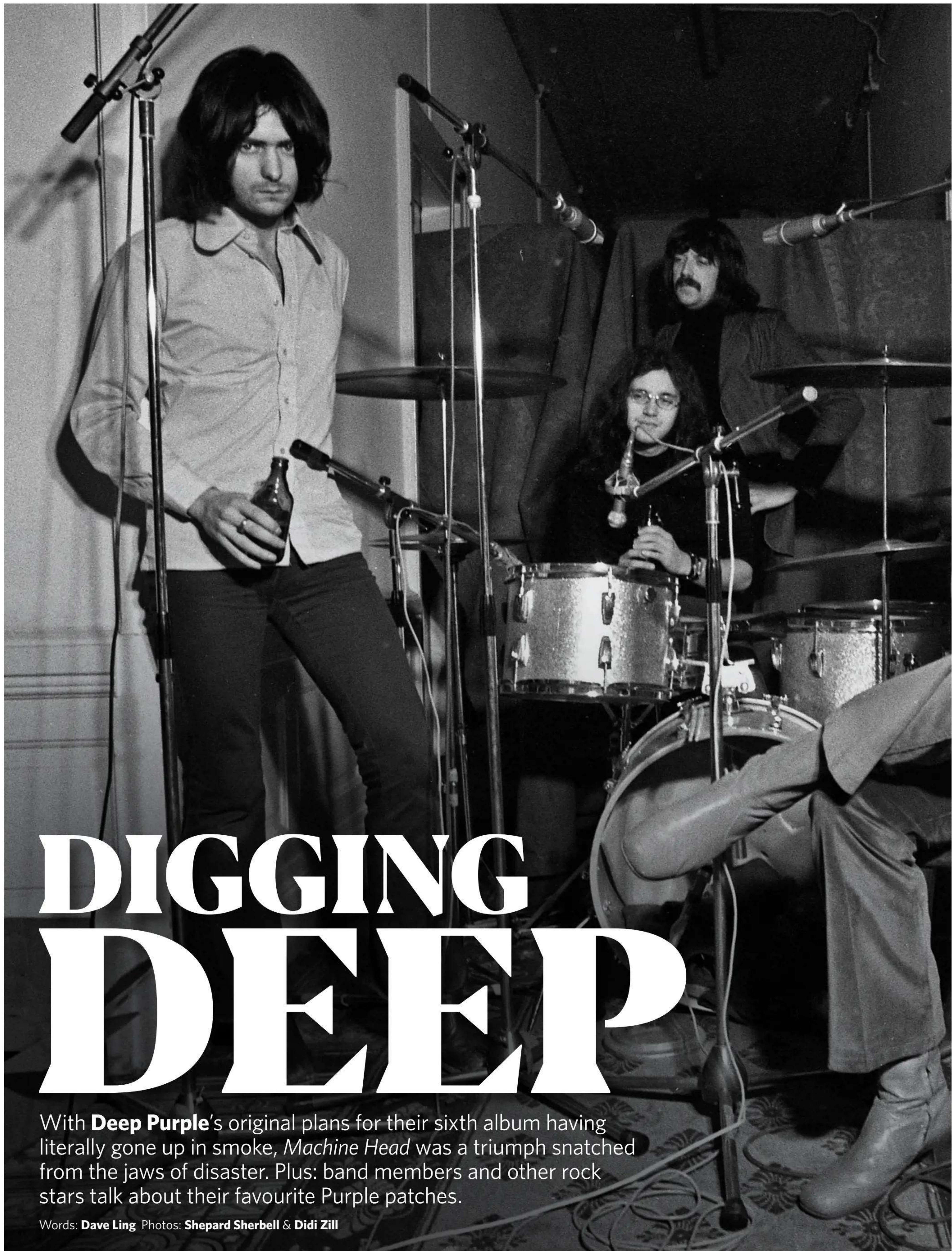
FLICK OF THE SWITCH

(Albert/Atlantic, 1983)



BLOW UP YOUR VIDEO

(Albert/Atlantic, 1988)



DIGGING DEEP

With **Deep Purple**'s original plans for their sixth album having literally gone up in smoke, *Machine Head* was a triumph snatched from the jaws of disaster. Plus: band members and other rock stars talk about their favourite Purple patches.

Words: **Dave Ling** Photos: **Shepard Sherbell** & **Didi Zill**



The dramatic tale of Deep Purple's sixth album has rightly been etched into rock music folklore for more than half a century. Frankly, if you haven't heard it, then you're probably reading the wrong magazine, but here's the gist of what happened. Fancying the idea of working in an unusual environment and also avoiding punitive UK tax laws, the band's celebrated Mk II line-up – vocalist Ian Gillan, guitarist Richie Blackmore, keyboard player Jon Lord, bassist Roger Glover and drummer Ian Paice – booked the Montreux Casino, overlooking Lake Geneva, a picturesque yet somewhat unlikely location, with producer engineer Martin Birch and the Rolling Stones Mobile hired to capture the sounds.

The events of December 4, 1971, shall never be forgotten. Immediately before the session, during a concert by Frank Zappa And The Mothers Of Invention some idiot shot a flare gun into the ceiling, and the building burned to the ground. On the other side of the lake, the Purple contingent looked on as their plans literally went up in flames. However, inspired by the billowing smoke drifting across the water towards them, at least they got a pretty good song out of it all.

Looking for a new place to record, an attempt to use a local theatre was thwarted due to noise pollution. So with hundreds of mattresses and blankets piled up around them in a corridor to dampen down the sound, and the Stones Mobile set up outside the building, making checking the playbacks very difficult, they began work on the record now known as *Machine Head* at freezing cold, out-of-season hotel The Grand.

"It was a huge, forbidding place – cold, damp, with great ceilings and echoing corridors," Jon Lord recalled decades later. "I wouldn't have wanted to stay there in a million years. But we could get it for about thruppence a week."

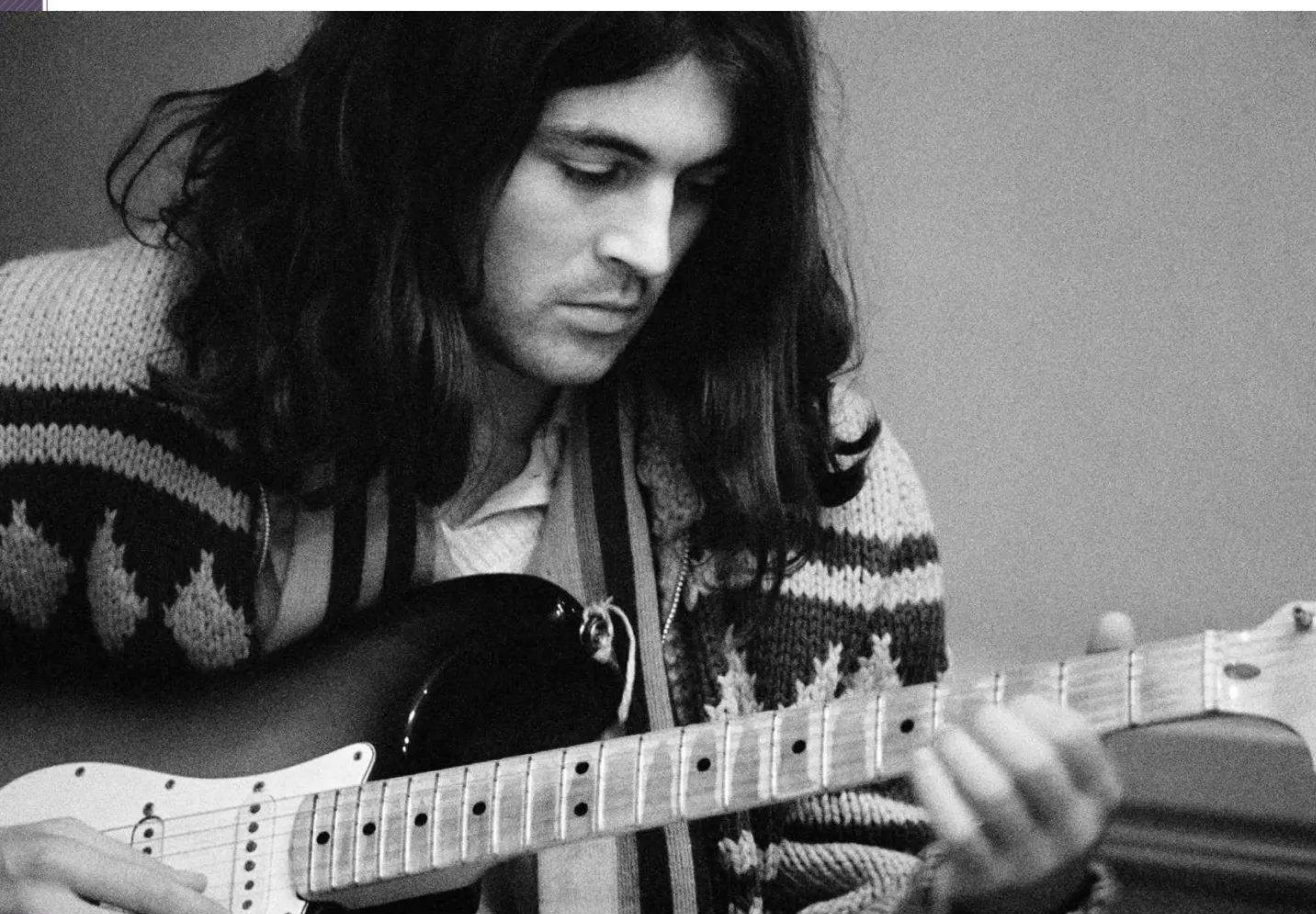
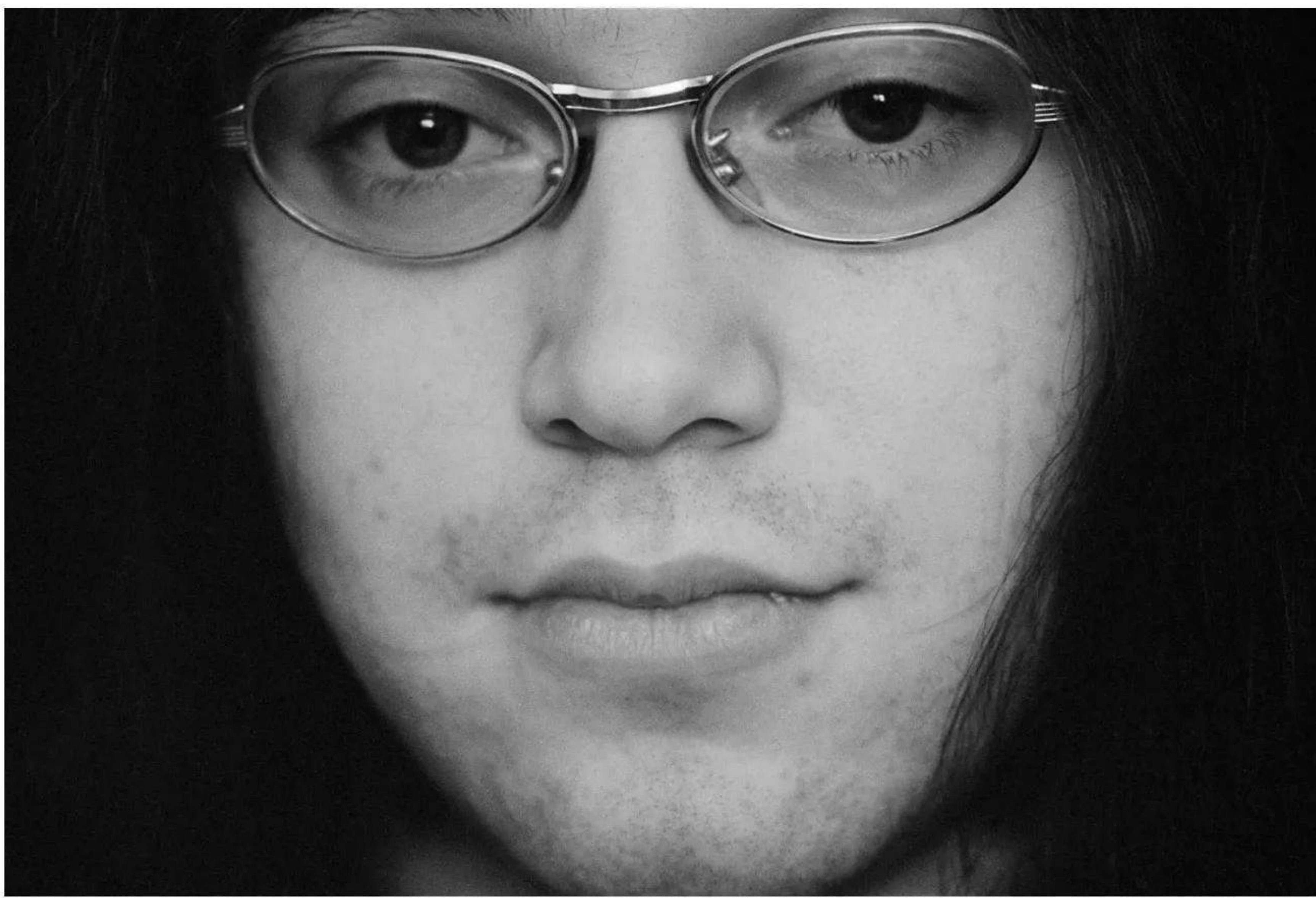
Released on March 25, 1972, *Machine Head* topped the chart in the UK and across the world. In America it thrust them into the Top 10 there for the first time. By 1986 it had sold two million copies in the US.

Blackmore, who quit the band for the first time three years later, told *Classic Rock*: "We made *Machine Head* in three weeks and three days, I think. It was very productive, very constructive, and it had some really good songs. It captured what we were about at the time. *Machine Head* came out and it was a reasonable hit. But it wasn't until *Made In Japan* [Purple's celebrated double live album released in December 1972], when we did those songs on stage, that people actually absorbed it and registered that it was a good record. I was surprised because I preferred the recorded [studio] versions."

Down the years and in various formats, *Machine Head* has been repackaged many times, including a seemingly definitive five-disc 40th-anniversary package. Now comes the Super Deluxe edition – a three-CD/gatefold LP/Blu-ray bumper package that adds new stereo and Dolby Atmos mixes by Zappa's son Dweezil, using the original multitrack tapes, nine previously unheard tracks performed at the Montreux Casino in 1971, and a performance from the BBC's Paris Theatre in London during the year of the album's release.

When asked how he feels about the repackaging of albums he made more than half a century >

DEEP PURPLE



“It didn’t occur to me until years later that the elements of Purple covered the whole spectrum of music.” Ian Gillan

ago, Ian Gillan shrugs: “I can see why [the record companies] are doing it. They have to make the music reach today’s audiences, I suppose. Everyone has to work their catalogue, so from a business point of view it makes complete sense. I think this new version will reach a lot of people who weren’t there at the time.”

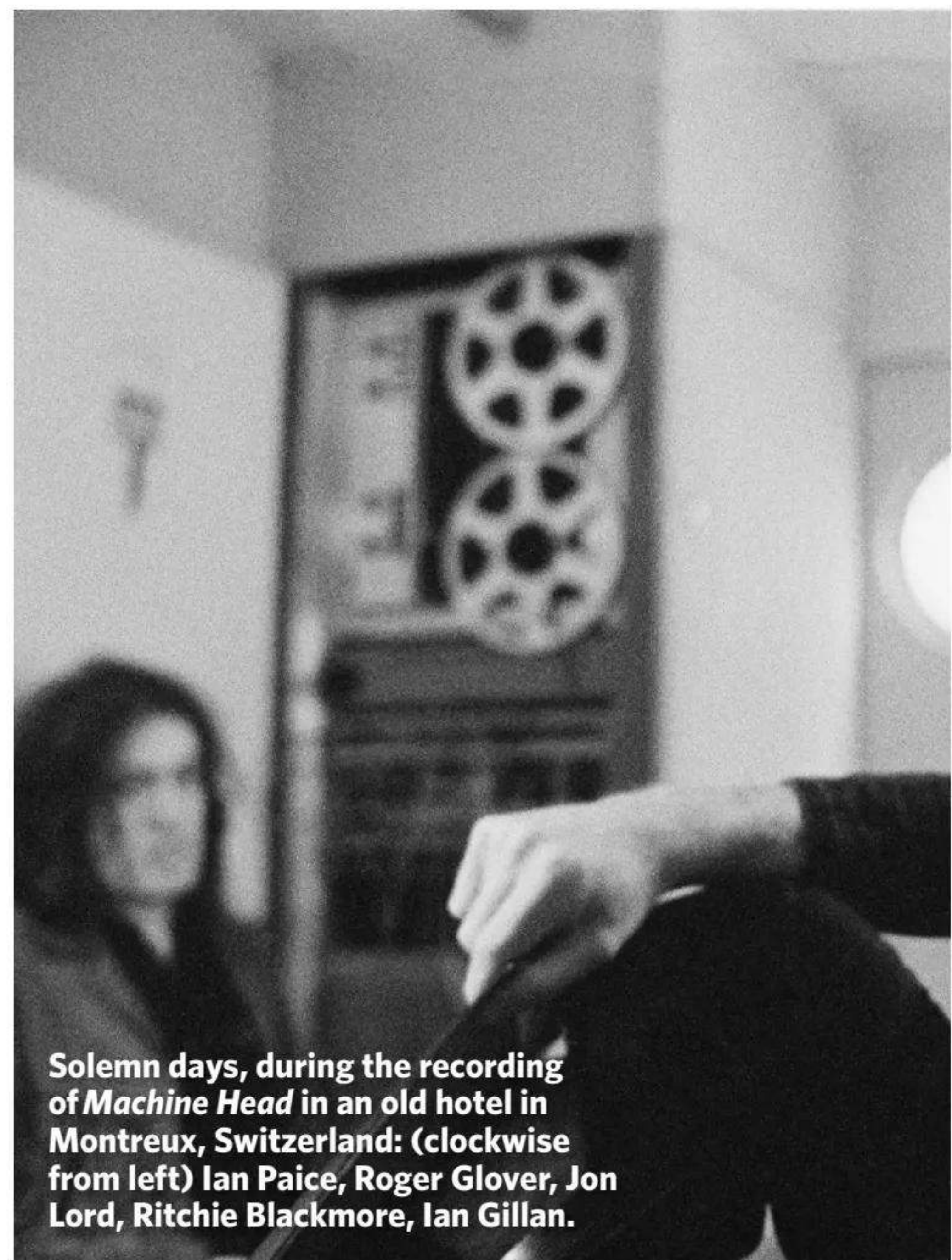
On the day that *Classic Rock* spoke to Ian Gillan, he hadn’t heard the Zappa remixes in their entirety, although the singer remains enthusiastic.

“Roger and I were at my place in Portugal working on the new Purple album when we were sent the new version of *Smoke On The Water*, and we went: ‘Oh my God,’” he exclaims. “It’s hard for

me to compare the two versions, because obviously one is ingrained in your mind over a very long period of time. But having said that, there’s also the fact that the *Smoke On The Water* that I know best is the one that we do on stage. From a subjective perspective, I’m quite happy with all of this.”

One rarely mentioned aspect is that nobody holds a gun to anyone’s head. If you’ve still got the original vinyl bought back in the 70s, or you consider any of the CD reissues to be sufficient, then stick with those.

“That’s right. And there’s a big discussion about this,” Gillan acknowledges. “I must admit, I can see



Solemn days, during the recording of *Machine Head* in an old hotel in Montreux, Switzerland: (clockwise from left) Ian Paice, Roger Glover, Jon Lord, Ritchie Blackmore, Ian Gillan.

both sides of the debate. I had some things to say when the Beatles and the Zeppelin albums were remixed. It was a struggle for me, because I had been there at the time. The same rule applies here, I’m aware of that.”

However, if the process is conducted with sufficient care and thought, then it’s possible to do it with integrity.

“Again, I agree,” Gillan affirms. “I’m very impressed with what has been done here.”

The live tracks recorded at the ill-fated Montreux Casino are a nice touch.

“I haven’t heard those, either” [laughs]. “I have just signed off on the new Deep Purple album, so that’s where my attention has been.”

At such an early stage, Gillan is reticent to discuss that album, Purple’s twenty-third and the follow-up to their 2021 covers set *Turning To Crime*, apart from saying: “I’m thrilled to bits with what’s coming. It’s the first album that we’ve made with Simon [McBride, the guitarist who replaced Steve Morse in ’22] and I think the fans will be very pleased with it. I don’t want to say much more than that, except that I think it will be out in July.”

Let’s go back to the early 1970s. What goes through Gillan’s mind when he hears newly unearthed recordings from the period, full of improvisation and charged with the spirit and fearlessness of youth?

“Well, I’m very proud to have been in the band,” he says. “Whether through serendipity or not, call it what you like, we are bloody survivors. Back then we took all of the things that you just mentioned for granted, though I didn’t realise that at the time. I came from a musical family; my grandad sang opera, my uncle was a jazz pianist, and I was a boy soprano in the church choir. Then I heard *Heartbreak Hotel* [released by Elvis Presley in 1956] and everything changed. It didn’t occur to me until years later that the elements of Purple covered the whole spectrum of music, from classical composition to jazz, blues and rock’n’roll, soul and funk – it was all there. For all of that to come together was almost a miracle. I think that’s



what gave us the ability take things into different areas. It got us through an awful lot.

"I don't think the band was ever contrived, except maybe perhaps during the 1980s," he continues. "We felt a little displaced from our identity as fashions changed. I don't think we had the confidence to be quite as bold as before [the reunion]. There was pressure to shrink into something that was acceptable, but that wasn't the fault of Roger [Glover], because we didn't have in-house production the time. We were spending far too long on arrangements, and to be perfectly honest sometimes the writing wasn't really up to scratch. As we emerged from that, I was able to look back with more confidence on the early days, and they were quite remarkable. So listening to those live recordings, the freedom and joy we had, and the confidence in each other, is remarkable."

Did being on stage with Purple sometimes feel like walking a tightrope?

"I'd call it a multi-dimensional trapeze act, not a bloody tightrope [laughs]. "There certainly was no safety net, that's for sure."

Dweezil Zappa says *Machine Head* is: "One of those records where I think: 'How did they come up with this?'" And Bruce Dickinson from Iron Maiden has stated that his first exposure to Deep Purple was like hearing music from another planet. Gillan touched upon this theme already, but has he ever pondered along the same lines as Dweezil and Bruce?

"Well, I only did so only afterwards," he considers. "Distance provides objectivity, but at the time we didn't spend much time analysing things. We were too busy doing it. There was no need to analyse – it just was."

Do you think of *Machine Head* as the crown jewel of the Purple catalogue?

"Yes – of that [first] era. And it's certainly one of the top three [of our career]. Which albums are those?" he asks with a laugh. "Well, it all depends

on the day. I'll say that *Fireball* was important. We couldn't have done *Machine Head* without [its 1971 predecessor] *Fireball*. But it changes on a daily basis."

Over the pages that follow, dozens of musicians have picked and talk about their favourite tracks by Deep Purple. Ex-Black Sabbath guitarist Tony

Time is better than the studio one. The *Made In Japan* version is crazy."

In discussing his choice, Mr. Big singer Eric Martin related a tale of being invited into your trailer to discuss a guest appearance on a Rock Meets Classic tour in Germany, only to find you butt-naked. "Apparently, Ian is a nudist," he told us.

"That's right," Gillan says, "I am a nudist. That's why I live up in the hills."

Martin also mentioned that you are, as he put it, "hung like a Clydesdale horse".

"I don't know what Eric had been smoking that day," Gillan responds with a laugh. "If I am hung like a Clydesdale horse, then it's only during the warmer weather." 🍷

Deep Purple's Machine Head: Super Deluxe is available via Universal Music. ➤

“Whether through serendipity or not, call it what you like, we are bloody survivors.”

Ian Gillan

Iommi went with *Speed King*, Paul Stanley of Kiss and many others chose *Burn*, while Joe Bonamassa picked a very specific version of *Child In Time* – it had to be the one from *Made In Japan*.

"I'm looking forward to reading them," Gillan states. "I think Joe is probably right. I'm not a big fan of live albums, but the live version of *Child In*



IAN GILLAN

The man at the mic picks five Deep dazzlers.

Mary Long

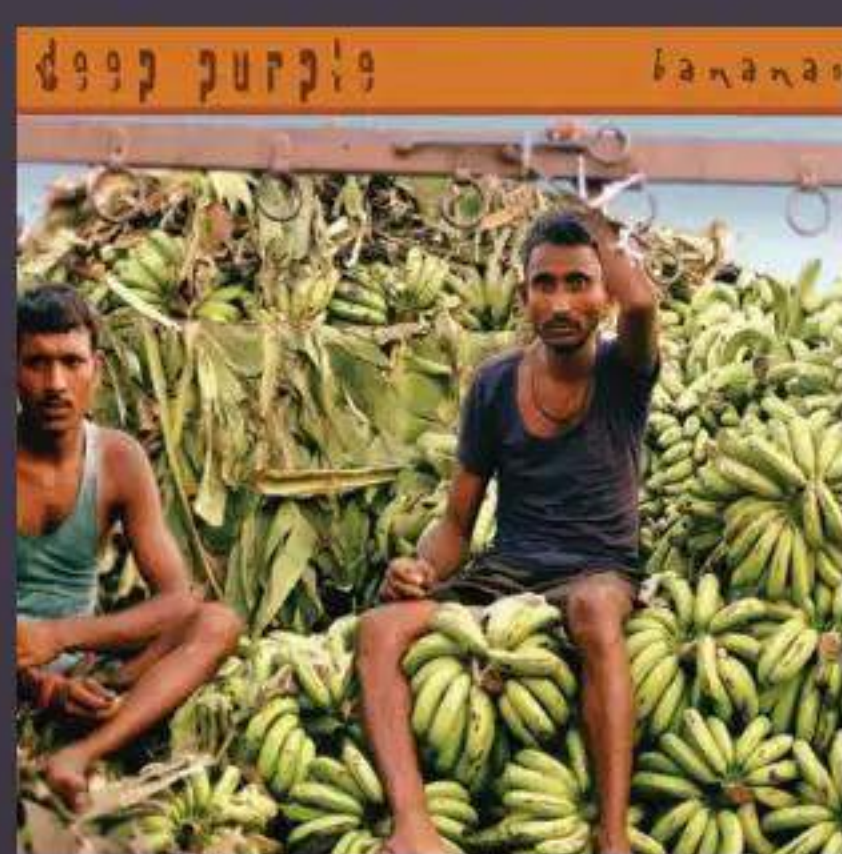
(*Who Do We Think We Are*, 1973)

"I'd like to point out that I'm choosing these songs spontaneously, they could all change tomorrow. I like *Mary Long* because nobody had written a song like that before. [The name Mary Long was a composite of the 'moral crusaders' Mary Whitehouse and Lord Longford, who were particularly active in the 60s and 70s. Its opening lines were: 'Mary Long is a hypocrite/She does all the things that she tells us not to do'.] I was twenty-something years old and full of opinions."

Rapture Of The Deep

(*Rapture Of The Deep*, 2005)

"I think *Rapture* is quite similar to a song like *Pictures Of Home* [from *Machine Head*]. It was a very good collaboration between Steve Morse and Don Airey. *Rapture Of The Deep* has a slight Oriental feel to it. The riff is great – and I think the words are pretty good too [laughs]."



deep purple



rapture of the deep

Razzle Dazzle

(*Bananas*, 2003)

"I'm picking this one just to annoy Ian Paice, who doesn't like it. Me, I think it's brilliant. But Ian comes from an entirely different perspective – sitting behind the drums."

Into The Fire

(*In Rock*, 1970)

"*Into The Fire* has always been one of my all-time favourites that we did. I still love singing that one right to the present day. It's a slice of pure, raucous, uninhibited rock'n'roll – albeit mid-tempo rock'n'roll."

Lazy

(*Machine Head*, 1972)

"I'm going to pick something from the album we're here to talk about... Let's say *Lazy*. [When *Classic Rock* asks Ian whether he

means the studio version, or the longer, looser take on *Made In Japan*, Gillan ponders the question for a moment and then with a smirk replies: "Both".]

SHADES OF DEEP PURPLE



Hush

(*Shades Of Deep Purple*, 1968)



"I was a fan of the original Purple, with Rod Evans on vocals, before the arrival of Ian Gillan. As a teenager I got to see the Mk I line-up of the band; believe me, I was a fan. The first time I heard

their version of *Hush* [which was written by the American singer-songwriter Joe South] it blew me away. I mean: 'Who is this?!'"

RICKEY MEDLOCKE, LYNYRD SKYNYRD

"*Hush* reached Number Two on the chart in Canada, where I'm from. I still remember hearing it on the radio as a tiny girl and singing it over and over again. Inspired by an old gospel tune of the same name by Joe South, Purple's version has every element of what I love about rock'n'roll. It has an infectious tribal rhythm, cool harmonies and dynamics and ferocious musicianship. I also love those hooky 'na na na's. Blackmore squeezes in an infinite amount of nasty guitar licks; Ian Paice and those signature drum fills; oozing, bluesy vocals; and – the icing on the cake – Jon Lord's wicked Hammond solo. Yet still, this somehow manages to be a pop tune. How did they even do that? I've spent my whole career trying to make music like this."

LEE AARON

"There are many hard rock songs by Purple that I could have picked, but I love the one that started it all off for the band – their version of *Hush*. The whole tune and its overall energy is great, but the contribution of Jon Lord is what makes it *really* special. His B3 [Hammond organ] playing on that song is like nothing else I ever heard. I could name other classic rock songs with astounding B3 licks – *Gimme Some Loving* by the Spencer Davis Group would be one, but Lord's performance on that song makes it one of the greatest fucking records I ever heard. It fucking rips me up every time."

WALTER TROUT

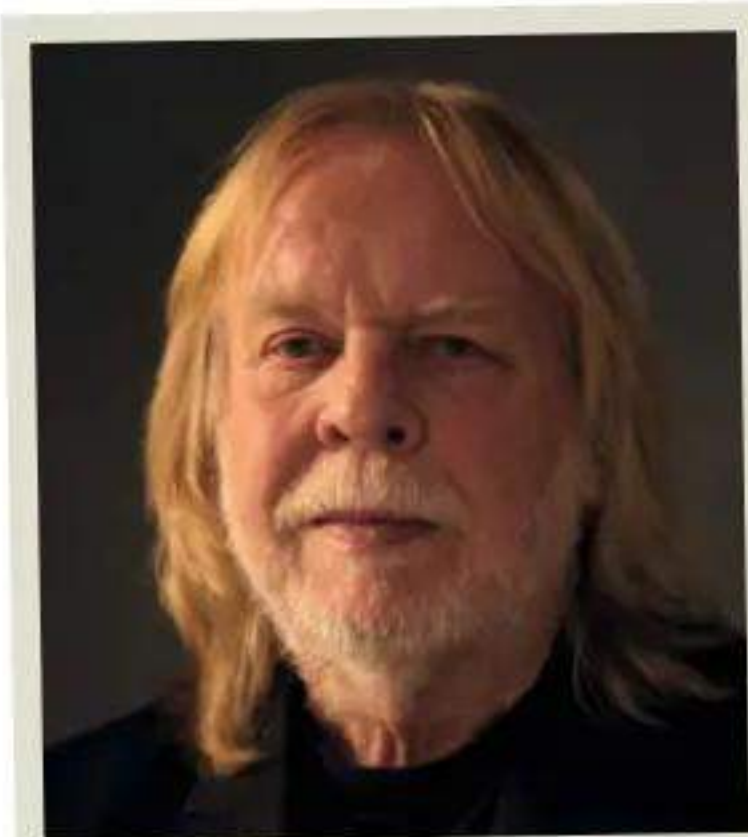
IAN PAICE SAYS

"The studio version was brilliant. *Hush* is still one of those songs that when it comes on the radio, you turn it up."

"The whole of that first album was done in one eight-hour session, eight tracks in eight hours, though of course we'd practised for a couple of months. *Hush* is just a great track. Fifty-odd years later we still play it live and it's become a samba. The original was a country tune, but it's like Brazilian music. We take things right down and everybody in the crowd sings it. It's wonderful."

Help!

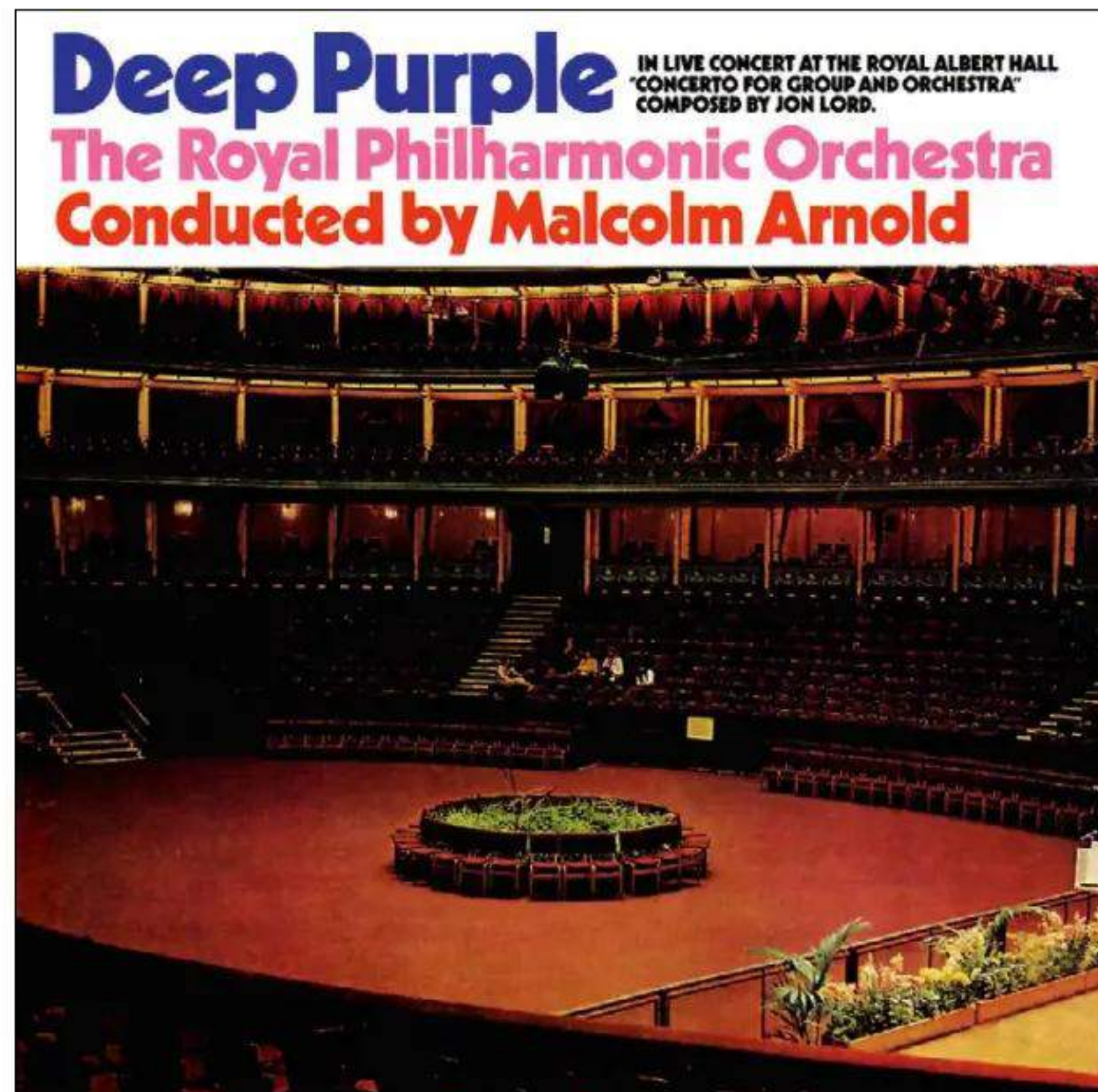
(*Shades Of Deep Purple*, 1968)



"I still remember buying *Shades Of Deep Purple* and thinking that it was way ahead of anything else that came out at that time. It had so many great songs. *Hush* had been a big single for them, but I really loved

their version of [The Beatles'] *Help!* It had beautiful organ and also superb guitar parts – it was a real *band* track. In my view, Rod Evans had the perfect voice for *Help!*, which Purple played as a ballad and not the way we know it as a Beatles song. In fact, many years later John Lennon admitted that he wrote *Help!* as a ballad. When you listen to Purple's version, it makes you realise that they were playing the song as it had been intended, and not a pop song."

RICK WAKEMAN



Concerto For Group And Orchestra

(*Concerto For Group And Orchestra*, 1969)

"In my school days I was really impressed with the album *Concerto For Group And Orchestra*, which was recorded by the band at the Royal Albert Hall in London. And I thought then, unwisely, that in the future, should I ever headline the Albert Hall, I should do *Otway And Orchestra*."

"When the time finally came, I was advised that to do what Deep Purple did with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra would be prohibitively expensive. But luckily, at the time I was listening to their album I was in the Aylesbury Youth Orchestra, and to my delight, albeit with a few line-up changes, they still existed. So I was able to realise my Deep Purple-inspired dream thirty years later."

JOHN OTWAY



Early shade of Purple: (l-r) Ritchie Blackmore, Rod Evans, Ian Paice, Jon Lord, Nick Simper.

IAN PAICE SAYS:

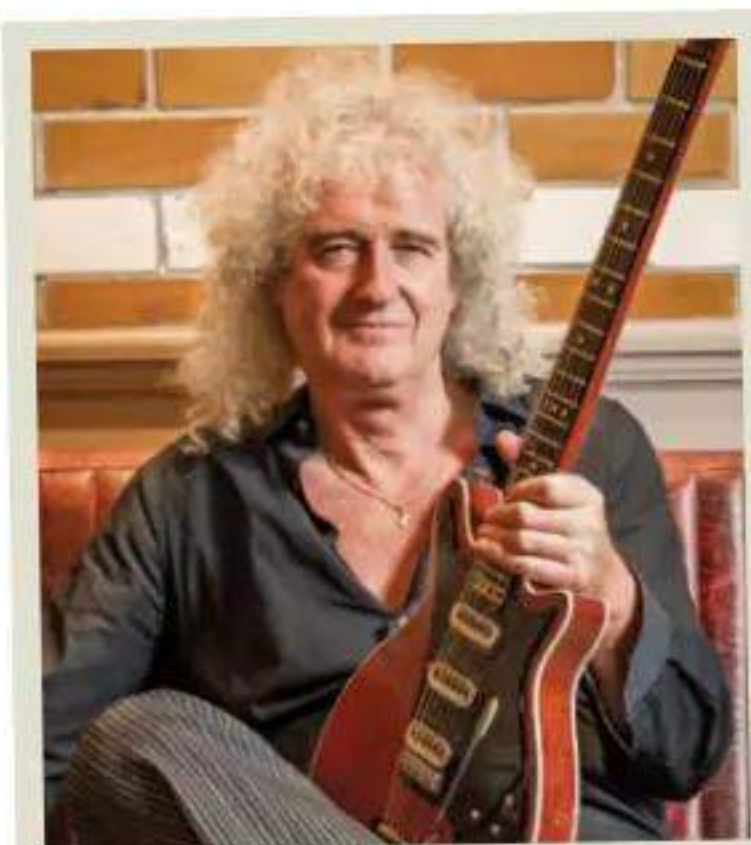
"The *Concerto For Group And Orchestra* was a wonderfully brave experiment. We were recording the debuts of Ian [Gillan] and Roger [Glover] on stage on a piece of classical music written by Jon Lord, performed with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra... before an audience at the Royal Albert Hall?"

"There was no monitoring of the sound on stage back then, and even in those days Deep Purple was a very loud band. We played the whole thing without hearing the orchestra even once. We just had to pray that everyone was in the same place."

"During the movement with the drum solo, I was supposed to bring the orchestra back in with a cowbell, and I couldn't remember the part. [Conductor] Malcolm Arnold stood there with his arms crossed and turned away from me with a look of absolute disdain."

Black Night

(Non-album single, 1970)



"I grew up alongside those guys, and I'm a big fan. For me, it's hard to beat *Black Night*. What an enormous riff – one of the biggest and best of all time. I love to play it myself, and I've played it on stage with the guys."

Playing off Paicey, one of the most monumental drummers in music, is quite something. He has that signature shuffle that not many people can do well. Being on stage with him, and locking into that, was one of the most memorable moments of my career."

"*Black Night* has got the best drum break in the world... [Brian imitates it, laughing]... that always makes me smile."

BRIAN MAY, QUEEN

"When that song came out I just couldn't stop playing it. It was so good. I used to go to my local Working Men's Club, and it was on the jukebox. After a while everybody got a bit sick of me playing it [laughs]."

"Ritchie Blackmore used a floating trem on it, and ever since I used one too. He was brave to have one on a Fender, as the technology wasn't fully there yet. When I used mine on *The Sinner* it was always squeaky-bum time."

KK DOWNING, KK'S PRIEST

"We're privileged to have played with Deep Purple almost forty times. When we're out with them, each of us has one particular favourite that we try not to miss each night, one that you scurry from where you are in the arena to reach the side of the stage for, and for me it's *Black Night*. There's an energy about *Black Night* that no other song of theirs has. The riff is epic, it's singalong-able, everything about it is perfect."

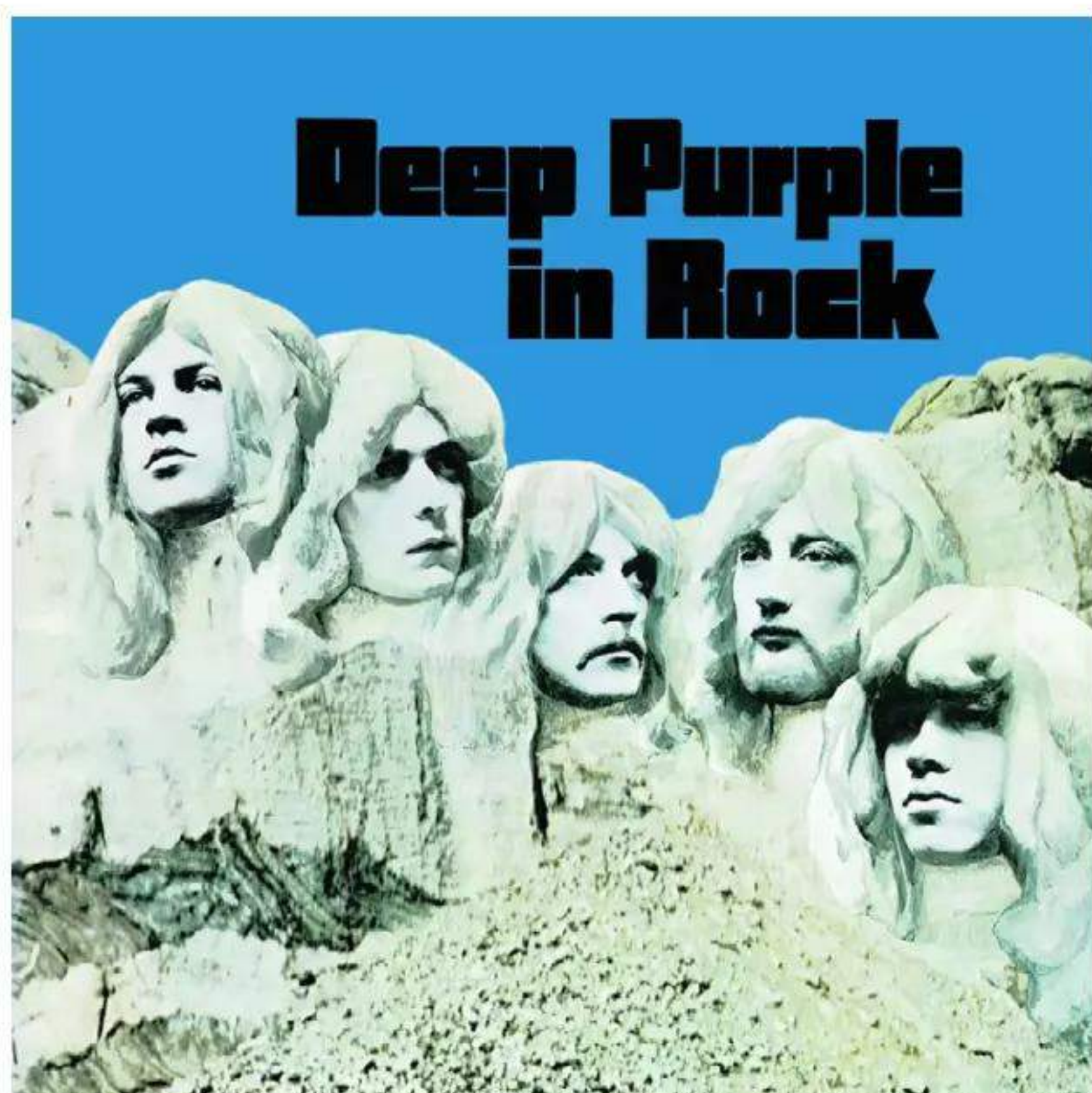
JON HARVEY, MONSTER TRUCK

IAN PAICE SAYS

"That song is madness, really. The record company wanted a single, but we were perpetually out on the road. We went into De Lane Lea Studios in London without a song. After jamming for a while we still had nothing, and Ritchie said: 'This is hopeless, let's go to the pub.' When we came out at chucking-out time, nobody was in a fit state for anything. Somebody remembered an old Ricky Nelson version of a George Gershwin tune called *Summertime* that went... [he hums the riff]. We decided to take that and change it a bit. I was wobbling behind the kit by now."

"We were pissed off at being told we had to write a hit record, so I started to play drum fills that shouldn't fit, crossing the tempos over. Gillan wrote the most ridiculous lyrics ever: '*Black night, can't see dark light, can't feel so bright*'. An hour later we had our song. The record company loved it: 'Genius, boys!' The public loved it too. But it was literally done in about two hours of drunkenness." ➤

DEEP PURPLE



Child In Time

(Deep Purple In Rock, 1970)



"My dad introduced me to Deep Purple when I was eleven years old, and to this day he wants Halestorm to cover that song. I keep on having to tell him: 'We really can't do that, it's fifteen minutes long!' [It's

actually a little over ten minutes – Ed]. One of these days we may give it try.

"I love Deep Purple's radio hits, but every time I put together a playlist of theirs – or if my dad is visiting – we always have to play *Child In Time*. As a vocalist, all you can do is stand back and appreciate that performance by Ian Gillan because it's spectacular. Those high notes... Look, I can sing high, but I would be very nervous to go up that far. And as a song, *Child In Time* takes the listener on an incredible journey. It's a really long song, but it never gets old."

LZZY HALE, HALESTORM

"No disrespect to Glenn Hughes, who is a fantastic singer, but it's the classic Deep Purple with Ian Gillan and Ritchie Blackmore that I love. I could have just as easily picked *Speed King*, but I'm going to go with *Child In Time*. I love the way they used dynamics. So much of today's hard rock or heavy metal is so dense; it's full-volume from start to finish. Deep Purple were masters of building the tension, and it's hard to name a better example than *Child In Time*. It goes from a low whisper to a massive roar. I'm a massive fan of Ian Paice, but every member of the band plays the right thing as the song builds. And as for that lead vocal from Gillan – wow, it's just incredible."

ROINE STOLT, THE FLOWER KINGS

"I remember seeing them play that song at the Roundhouse [in London] and thinking: 'Fucking hell, how did that geezer get right up there [to those top notes]?' Thanking about it now, it still makes my eyes water."

PHIL MOGG, UFO

"I think of it as their [equivalent of Uriah Heep's own] *July Morning*. There are some live versions that see Ritchie in absolutely stunning form. The interplay between him, Ian Gillan's voice and Jon Lord on the keyboards is unquestionable.

MICK BOX, URIAH HEEP



One of the two 'classic' Purple line-ups, circa 1971: (l-r) Ritchie Blackmore, Ian Paice, Jon Lord, Roger Glover, Ian Gillan.

"I always loved *Child In Time*, probably because it has so many prog sensibilities. Jon Lord's keyboard playing is absolutely outstanding, plus the song's dynamics: the way it starts slowly and gently and then explodes, before whispering out again. It's so brilliantly written."

FISH

Speed King

(Deep Purple In Rock, 1970)



"I always liked Deep Purple, and my favourite album of theirs is *In Rock*. It has one classic song after another. They always used to come up with great riffs, and *Speed King* is hard to beat. It's

a great, energetic song that shows every member of the band doing what they did best. Gillan's vocals and the keyboards of Jon Lord... They were such great musicians."

TONY IOMMI

"We liked it so much that we covered it on our album *Inspirations*. When Deep Purple wrote *Speed King*, I suspect they felt the way I did on the day I wrote *Motorcycle Man*. I wrote that in about thirty seconds. I had the chorus, wrote down the lyrics

and never even bothered to go back and see whether they made any sense. *Speed King* is a great song but the lyrics – which reference Little Richard – sound like they were written in a bit of a hurry. Maybe Ian Gillan had had a drink or a smoke, I don't know. Gillan influenced me a lot because he didn't always use that slow, bluesy phrasing, he liked to scream."

BIFF BYFORD, SAXON

To me, *Speed King* and the *In Rock* album were the blueprint for what The Sweet aimed at. Don't believe me? Go and listen to Brian Connolly and company on *Sweet Fanny Adams*, which came out four years later. Both albums rocked hard. And Ian Gillan was about as good a rock singer as there's ever been. Majestic stuff!"

GREG HART, CATS IN SPACE

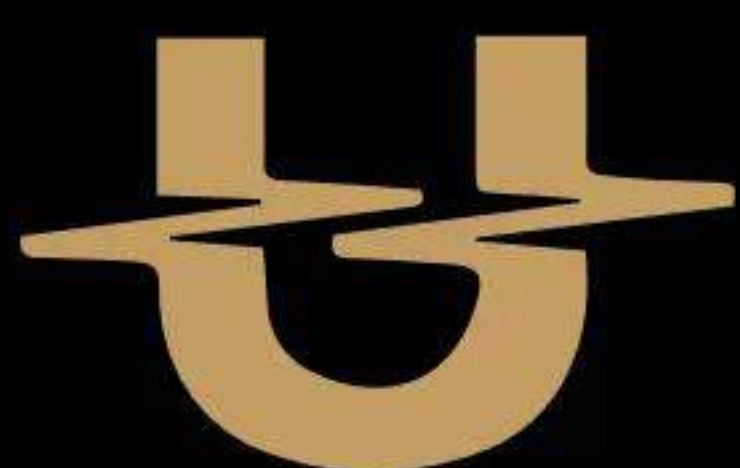
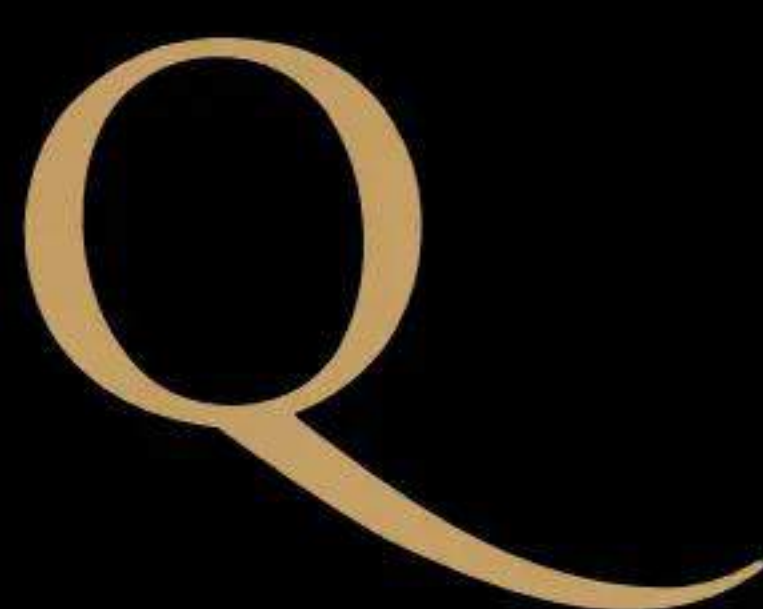
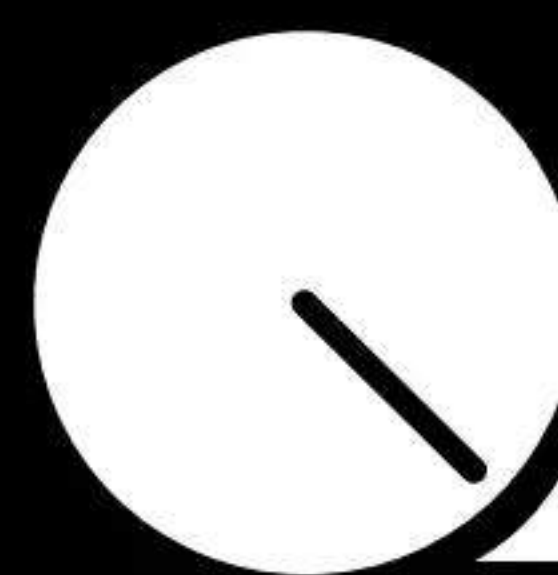
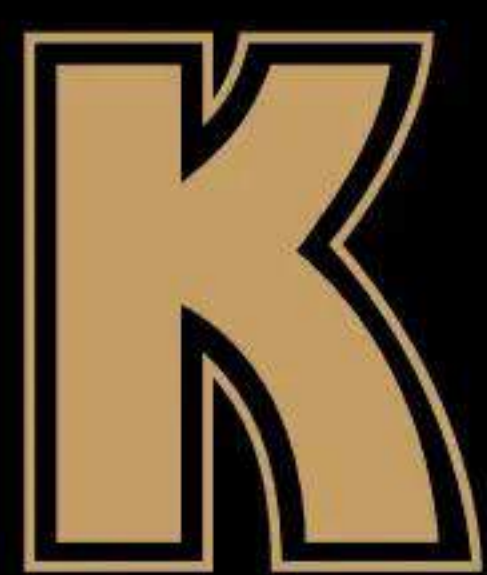
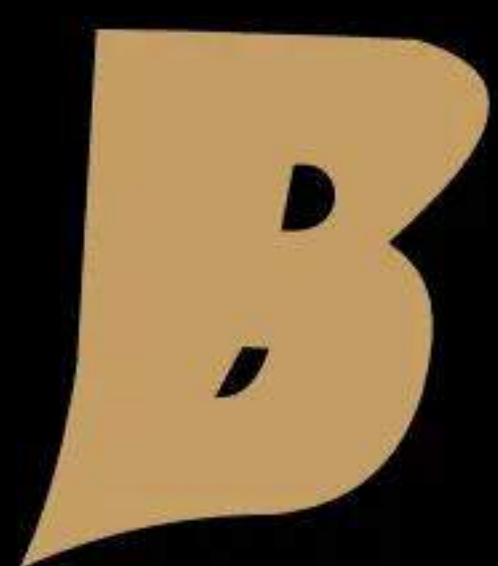
"I like that song *Speed King*. It does a lot in a very short amount of time. And Ritchie Blackmore is one of the coolest-looking guitar players around. He's like a sorcerer. I tip my wizard's hat to him."

PELLE ALMQVIST, THE HIVES

Bloodsucker

(Deep Purple In Rock, 1970)

Bloodsucker is a favourite of mine because, like all the best Deep Purple tunes, it's a collection of punishing blues riffs that struts super-hard and ➤



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DEEP PURPLE

Deep Purple in their element circa 1973: on stage.



makes you feel super-tough. It also has a great trading section where Ritchie Blackmore and Jon Lord compete to see who has the biggest musical biceps. It's a little less driving than some of their other well-known tunes, but what it might lack in velocity it makes up for in groove. Just good old-fashioned hard rock mayhem."

SHAMUS CURRIE, THE SHEEPDOGS

Flight Of The Rat

(Deep Purple In Rock, 1970)

"I love it because it's as long as a Praying Mantis song – a few seconds short of eight minutes. Blackmore's riff is just amazing, also that little lick that he does at the end of the chorus. And then it just goes off into the stratosphere, all of the instrumental players just do their thing. It's like having a live album without being a live album. It's a really great tune."

TINO TROY, PRAYING MANTIS

Into The Fire

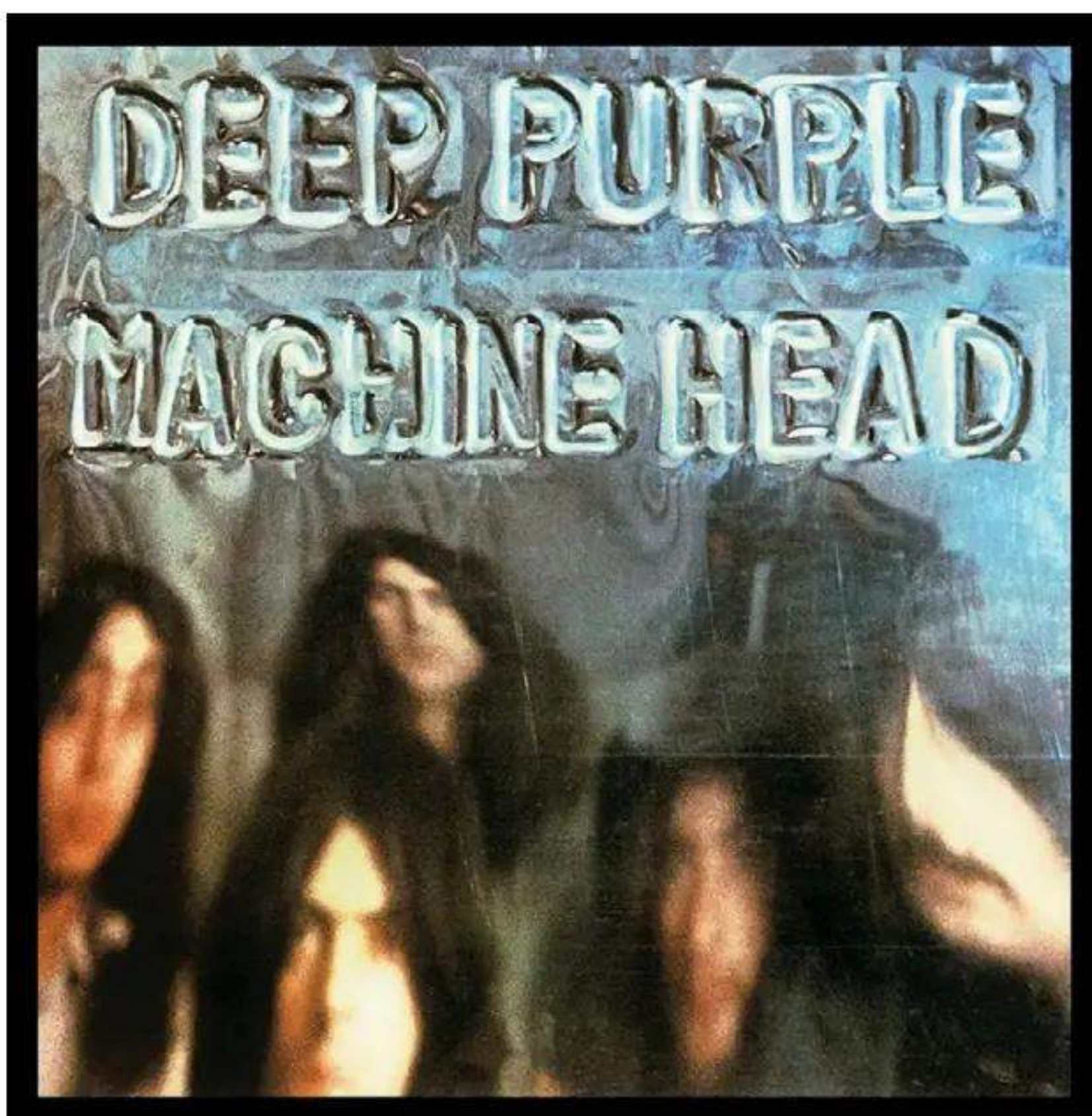
(Deep Purple In Rock, 1970)

"I have always loved Deep Purple, and touring with them [in 2015] was a dream come true. Oh my god, it blew my mind when Don Airey told me he was a fan of our band and he expected us to give Purple a run for their money. That was so rad. Both bands became fast friends.

"I could pick an obvious song like *Space Truckin'* but that's a bit cheap. I would like to pick *Smoke On The Water* because I got to play it on stage with them in London. My thirteen-year-old self would never have believed that was possible. But again it's way too obvious.

"So I'm going to go with something much deeper: *Into The Fire*, from *In Rock*. It's groovy but still mellow. Deep Purple never really get away from 'explosive', do they?"

SCOTT HOLIDAY, RIVAL SONS



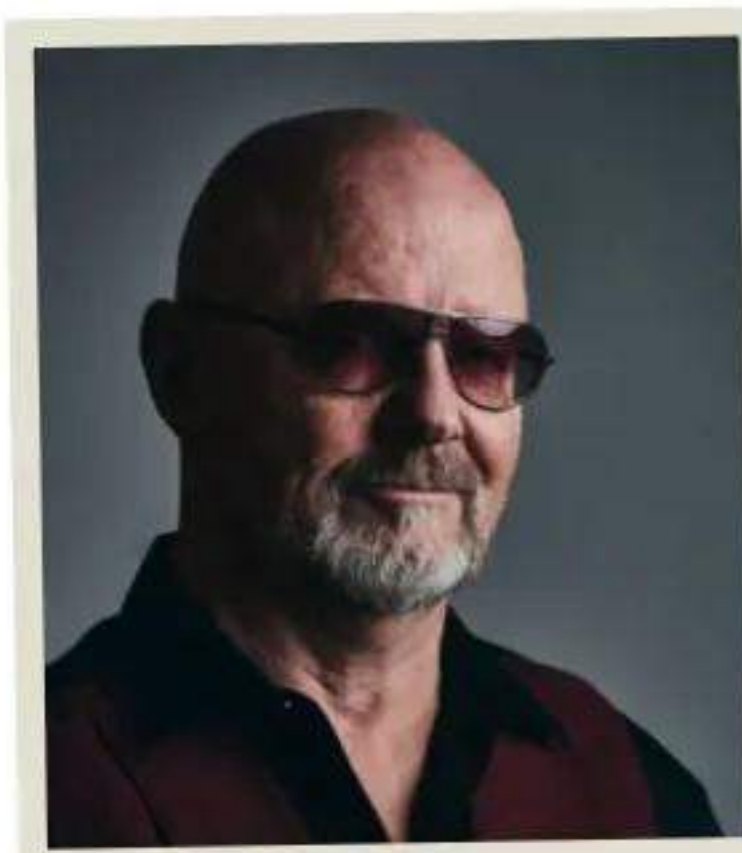
Highway Star

(Machine Head, 1972)



"When I toured with Deep Purple [as a stand-in guitarist, from 1993-94], *Highway Star* was always the biggest thrill for me. The album version is a relentless, curiously swinging, high-energy song with some of the best ensemble playing the band has ever recorded. Everyone in the band shines brightly on this song. I think it was the first song I ever played with them at our one and only Japanese tour rehearsal. The first time we played it live, all I could think of was: 'How am I going to live up to Ritchie's freaky, symbiotic connection to Jon Lord's immense sound and groove?' It was impossible to emulate Ritchie's strange, overdubbed solo guitar harmonies live, but playing his main part always put smile on my face and made my heart pump a little faster – maybe a lot faster!"

JOE SATRIANI



"Wishbone Ash got our deal with Decca/MCA after Ritchie Blackmore recommended us to producer Derek Lawrence. Ritchie and I had jammed during a sound-check when we supported Purple at one

of our earliest shows [Dunstable Civic Hall, November 10, 1969].

"I first saw them at the Windsor Jazz & Blues Festival in 1967, when they had a different lead singer [Rod Evans]. At the time they didn't feel like a band of the people, because they came on wearing frilly shirts. Then Ian Gillan came in, and to my mind there's only ever been one rock vocalist to beat him, and that's Arthur Brown. Just a few days ago I was listening to their current album, *Whoosh!* [2020]. Like us [Wishbone Ash], they're a band that's gone on and on and on.

"Although Deep Purple have a massive catalogue, it's very hard to beat *Highway Star*. It has a vibe that comes from the road. If, as has been claimed, they wrote it on the way to a gig, then that sums up the song's essence. They were thinking about beautiful young girls and driving along the road. If you're a young guy in a rock band thinking of eating up the miles down the motorway, then *Highway Star* will always put you in that head-space."

ANDY POWELL, WISHBONE ASH

"I like a bit of Deep Purple – or I used to. My mates at comprehensive school carried Led Zeppelin albums around under their arms, and the grammar-school boys all liked Deep Purple [laughs]. I had both.

"Picking a favourite is hard, but you've got to go with *Highway Star*. That one is fantastic. It's a bit punky, really, with the intro that goes: 'De de de de de', and all those sound effects on it.

"But I also liked *Burn* and *Child In Time*. And what was the one that started with the sound of a lift? *Fireball*, yeah. I liked that one, too."

STEVE DIGGLE, BUZZCOCKS



"The only Deep Purple line-up that matters is Gillan-Blackmore-Glover-Lord-Paice. I was a fan of [original singer] Rod Evans with Captain Beyond, but that was just Deep Purple lite. Coverdale and Hughes

than came in and had their moments, but the band was the band that wrote *In Rock*, *Machine Head* and *Who Do We Think We Are!*. That was fuckin' Deep Purple. And the best song of all was *Highway Star*. From the first not to the last it's absolutely perfect, in its structure, tonality and its attack. The vocals are unbelievable, and it has one of the greatest guitar solos of all time.

"You know, I've read that Purple wrote the song on the bus on the way to a show, and played it live for the first time that same night. That just cannot be true! Honestly, how could it be? Maybe they wrote some of it that day, but the song is structured to sheer perfection. The classical patterns of those keyboards still blow me away every time I hear it.

“So many years later, I was thrilled when the song was introduced to a whole new generation of fans as part of the computer game *Rock Band*.”

DEE SNIDER, TWISTED SISTER

IAN PAICE SAYS

“The story about *Highway Star* being written on the way to a gig is completely true – I think it may have been Portsmouth. We had a journo on the bus with us, and he was asking some quite banal questions, one of which was: ‘How do you write a rock’n’roll tune?’ Ritchie was sat next to him, and he took out a guitar and said: ‘Just like this’, and he played this [Ian hums the staccato opening riff]. It was as simple as that. Ritchie told the guy: ‘That’s all you’ve got to do.’ And he went: ‘Oh, right.’

“Did we play the song on stage the same night? Well, I think we played *something like it*, yeah, because what Ritchie had played sounded alright. In those days there were no recording devices in the crowd, and you could try songs out knowing they wouldn’t go anywhere else. With good players you can create something on the fly, even with just a nod or a chord shape to keep things going. Obviously there were no real lyrics or melody lines, only Gillan screaming his head off with nods to old rock’n’roll tunes. But we took it into rehearsal, and that’s when we realised we had the shell of an idea of a song.”

Pictures Of Home

(*Machine Head*, 1972)

“*Machine Head* was the second album that I ever bought. For me, *Pictures Of Home* is the absolute perfect Deep Purple song. It’s an awesome performance from a super-talented band. All four instrumentalists and singer Ian Gillan are individually on fire as well as working beautifully together. Ritchie Blackmore’s unique style and sound inspired me to start practicing the guitar. Thank you, Ritchie. I still aspire to play with such flair.”

BRIAN TATLER, DIAMOND HEAD/SAXON



“I really like Deep Purple, but I don’t idolise them. The only artist I idolise is Jeff Lynne. All the same, Purple made some great albums, and I’ve known the band as guys since the days of [Gillan and

Glover’s pre-Purple band] Episode Six. Roger produced a single [*Wild Side Of Life*, 1976] for us. They are brilliant, just fantastic musicians. Just about any track from *Machine Head* will always be good, you really can’t go wrong. Let’s go with *Pictures Of Home*, shall we?”

FRANCIS ROSSI, STATUS QUO

IAN PAICE SAYS

“At first I wasn’t sure about *Pictures Of Home* on *Machine Head*, but I know how much it works on stage now. I have a fun time with it, but I also enjoy knocking it out of the set for a couple of months. For me it’s one of those slightly odd songs of ours.”



IAN PAICE

Eight faves from Purple’s only ever-present member.

Highway Star

(*Machine Head*, 1972)

“Not how it started in the studio, *Highway Star* became a monster on stage. And it’s still a monster. It’s almost like a template of how a hard rock band playing a rock’n’roll tune should be. It was really well-performed on the *Machine Head* record and the solos from Jon and Ritchie are incredibly interesting. The feel of the whole thing is so right.”

Space Trucking

(*Machine Head*, 1972)

“It came about when we tried to get Ritchie to play a Chuck Berry tune. He just wouldn’t do it. Finally, under much duress, compromised by playing four to the bar, which made a sound that was really hard – really good. So we tried something a bit different for us. I went in and over the backing track I overdubbed my little dream feature in the middle. That worked out really well. There was no reason for it to be there, except that it was a nice idea and it sounded really good. I’m still proud of that drumming to this day.”

Smoke On The Water

(*Machine Head*, 1972)

“Obviously I had to include this one, due to its phenomenal success. It’s a little harder to play [on stage] than people might think. If you get it wrong it’s very trudge-y, but play it right and it has a buzz and a bounce. I tell drummers: ‘It should have a little bounce, but it’s not quite a shuffle. There should be a pulse to move it along. If you do that, it works.’”

Rat Bat Blue

(*Who Do We Think We Are!*, 1973)

“That’s a great one. Don Airey told me that if you listen to it, even within the movement of the song, it ends just the way it began. It stays

where it should be. Listen to the incredibly fast, double-speed [keyboard solo] played by Jon, and there’s no real need for it to be there, just that we loved it.”

Silver Tongue

(*Bananas*, 2005)

“Rhythmically, *Silver Tongue* is a great piece of music with an outstanding melody. I mean, it just rips. We’ve got a few of those songs in a similar vein on different records, where the star is the feel. That’s when I’m coming from anyway.”

Ted The Mechanic

(*Purpendicular*, 1996)

“A really good and an important song. [It was the opening track of the band’s first album with Steve Morse on guitar.] It’s got a very rhythmic feel, that double-tempo shuffle that I find quite easy to play but a lot of drummers struggle with. Then again, there are things that I find difficult that others can do with ease. It was a nice track to play on stage, too.”

Any Fule Kno That

(*Abandon*, 1998)

“That was slightly unusual for us, with one of Gillan’s weird titles [Ian also brought a spoken-word

vibe to the verses, which some people saw as an attempt at rapping]. It sounded right. When I heard it back for the first time – what he’d done over the music – I thought it was wonderfully creative.”

No Need To Shout

(*Whoosh!*, 2020)

“That song was very good, and as an album *Whoosh!* sticks together very well as an entity. For me as a drummer, there wasn’t much to do, just to hold things tight and underpinning what the others did. Very simple, but hopefully it was effective.”





ROGER GLOVER

One half of the rhythm section throws a seven.

Hard Lovin' Man

(Deep Purple In Rock, 1970)

"Unlike concert halls, studios are very dead spaces. But the live sound we got on stage changed the band; it made us animated and aggressive. We started making violent music. With *Hard Lovin' Man* there was no toning down, it was full-on. Even in the studio, Jon was still rocking his Hammond back and forth. That song was a breakthrough for us because it defined what we did on stage."

No One Came

(Fireball, 1971)

"The thing I liked about Sly & The Family Stone was that the bass always plays on the off-beat. We started messing around with that. I think Ritchie came up with the chords. Ian Gillan wrote a brilliant set of lyrics which presaged his life ahead. I don't think Ritchie liked the song very much because he wanted more melody, but *No One Came* was like rap before rap."

Space Truckin'

(Machine Head, 1972)

"When I lived in America I turned on the car radio and heard this great song: really funky, but tough-sounding. I thought: 'This is fantastic.' It took me about ten seconds to realise it was us – the funky section with the jam between Paicey and Ritchie. I've never been able to see what other people liked about us. We had great success, but why? Suddenly I understood. I know that sounds strange."

Rat Bat Blue

(Who Do We Think We Are!, 1973)

"There's an old R&B song called, I think, *Watch Your Step*. I don't know whether Ritchie

used that as a blueprint for *Rat Bat Blue*, but our song has got a great riff. The album was a difficult one to make but *Rat Bat Blue* blew me away."

Perfect Strangers

(Perfect Strangers, 1984)

"It has an unusual arrangement, based on a song of Ritchie's that he had tried out unsuccessfully a year or two earlier with Rainbow. At our first [post-reunion] jam together, we started jamming and it kicked –

mostly because of Paicey, who has a feel unlike any other drummer. Even when he's playing hard rock he's a swing merchant. The segment when the riff goes down to an 'E' always blows me apart."

Loosen My Strings

(Purpendicular, 1996)

"One day at a studio in Orlando, I was early and changing strings, playing anything to see that I was in tune. Suddenly, a guitar started playing something that was completely different to what I'd done. I didn't even know that Steve was there. He suggested we

do it over again in a song. *Loosen My Strings* is written from the view of a guitar to its owner."

Above And Beyond

(Now What?!, 2013)

"Above And Beyond means a lot to me because it was about Jon Lord, who died while we were making the album. *Uncommon Man* was another we wrote about Jon, whose memory permeates that entire album. Steve started playing this riff that was unimaginably good. Heavy as fuck, yet it goes into this beautiful song which Ian sings very well."



Never Before

(Machine Head, 1972)



"I'm a bit of a weirdo with Deep Purple, because I came into them at a strange place. They weren't naturally one of 'my bands', because I was eight or nine when they formed and I was

still listening to The Archies.

"My entry point was the *Fireball* album. I got it in Violet May's record shop [in Sheffield] for fifty pence. That album was the first thing of theirs I ever heard. But months later I bought *Machine Head* and *In Rock*. And from *Machine Head* I'm gonna go with *Never Before*. Trust me, I didn't pick that song because I did it once with Duff McKagan, Matt Sorum and Steve Stevens on the album *Re-Machined* [2012], I love it because – dare I say it – it's a pop-rock song. It isn't massively heavy or driven by the organ. No disrespect to Jon Lord, but in a parallel universe I always thought Purple to be a twin-guitar band. Imagine the riff to *Smoke On The Water* played on two guitars?"

"Anyway, I'm picking *Never Before* because it has a great riff and great vocals. Ian Gillan always had a great way of telling stories, and this is an example of that."

JOE ELLIOTT, DEF LEPPARD

"Ian Gillan is among my favourite singers, and *Machine Head* got me into Deep Purple. From there I did my homework all the way back to *Hush*. But as a kid I always loved a deep cut called *Never Before*. Ritchie Blackmore is such a great guitarist, but there's no showing off here. *Never Before* is one of their most radio-friendly songs."

MICHAEL STARR, STEEL PANTHER

Smoke On The Water

(Machine Head, 1972)

"For me it has to be 'duh, duh, duh...' [he hums one of the most famous riff of all time]. I love it because it's great. The riff is great – everything about *Smoke On The Water* is great for a rock song. Am I not sick of it after all these years? No! I am choosing it because it's up there with the Steppenwolf song [*Born To Be Wild*] and [Scorpions'] *Rock You Like A Hurricane*. It's the essence of rock music."

RUDOLF SCHENKER, SCORPIONS



"In New Jersey there was a train that my mother would let me get on, that let you off right in Madison Square Garden. Deep Purple was the first concert I ever saw."

"I'd picked them up because of *Highway Star*, but *Smoke On The Water* was the standout track on the *Machine Head* album. And the impact of a song like that... Y'know, that riff was accessible for a young guitar student who was teaching himself how to play. If

you could play that riff, you could go to the school dance with your garage band and actually pull it off and be cool."

RICHIE SAMBORA



"I'm not what you'd call a stalker-collector, but I'm one of a handful of people to sing *Smoke On The Water* with Ian Gillan. We were on the Rock Meets Classic tour in Germany in 2015.

There was John Wetton, me, Rick Parfitt, Marc Storace from Krokus, and the Italian singer Gianna Nannini, plus a power-metal band [Sinner] and a forty-piece orchestra.

"Each night, Ian finished the show with *Smoke*. I really wanted to sing the second verse, the one about Frank Zappa and The Mothers – I wanted him to say: 'Eric, you take this one.' Hey, I have an ego! So I went to his trailer to ask. His pretty blonde assistant invited me in but warned Ian was getting changed. Apparently he's a nudist. She opens the door, and there is Ian Gillan... hung like a Clydesdale horse. I'm thinking: 'So that's what elephantitis means.' We had this great conversation – with Ian completely naked. He didn't bat an eyelid.

"My plan worked perfectly. That night Ian said: 'Eric, you sing it.' And boy, *Smoke On The Water* sounded great with an orchestra. It's out there, check it on YouTube."

ERIC MARTIN, MR. BIG

"I always enjoyed Deep Purple since the first time I saw them, in Germany as a seventeen-year-old backing musician for Chris Farlowe. Ian Gillan is one of the best rock vocalists, he's extremely consistent, and Jon Lord was a fantastic composer, as confirmed by his exploits in the classical world.

"It's got to be *Smoke On The Water* for me, because that song was the first of the big riffs that gradually became so prevalent. It was a great driving song – you had to be careful getting in the car and putting on *Smoke On The Water*. The guitar solo is great as well."

CARL PALMER

"This is such difficult question. Firstly because Purple have so many great songs, and secondly because David Coverdale and Joe Lynn Turner, two of my favourite vocalists, sang in the band. Coverdale was amazing on *Burn*, and Joe was brilliant on *Slaves And Masters*.

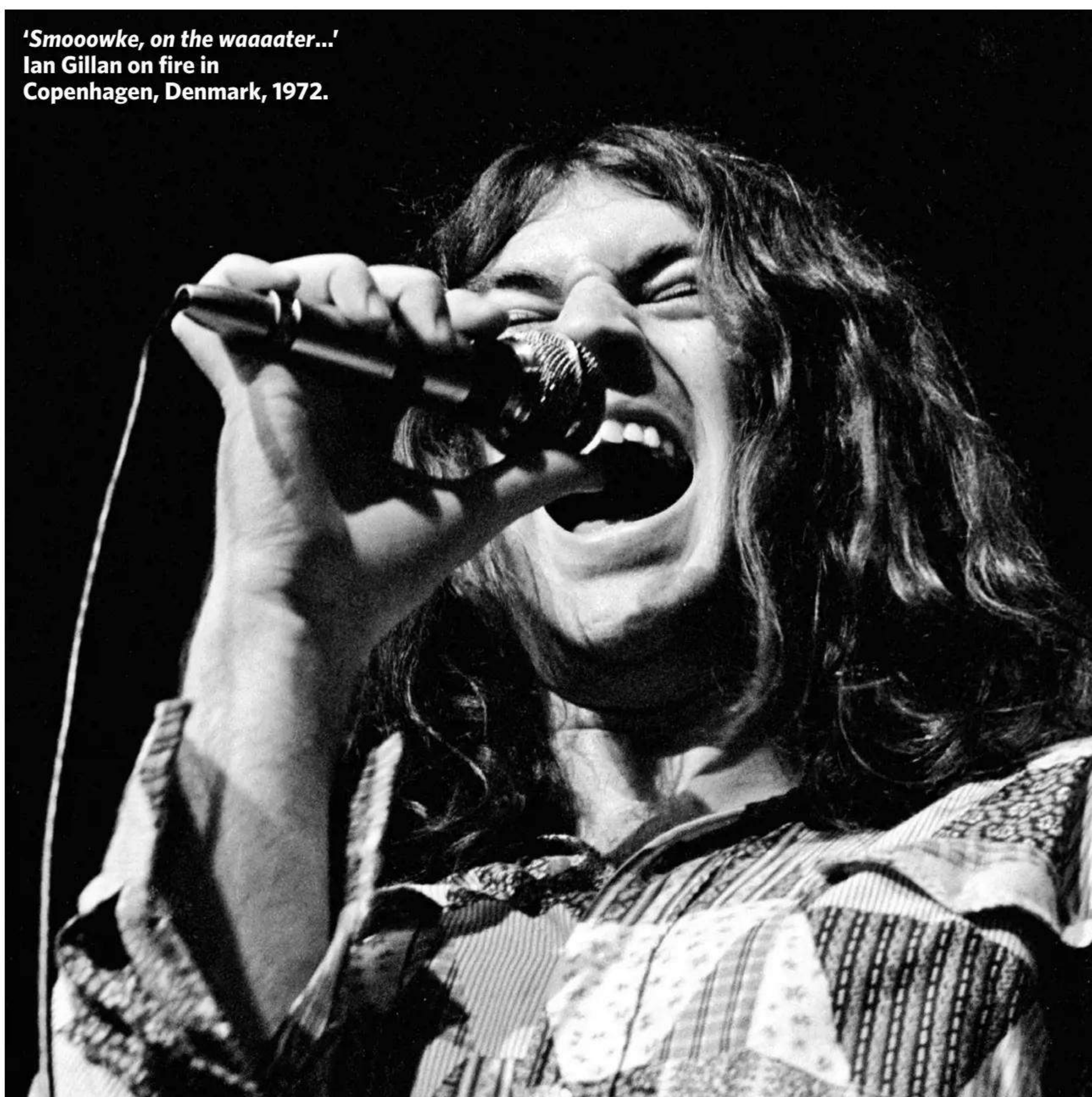
"If I really have to choose just one song by Deep Purple, it has to be *Smoke On The Water* all day long. It's the classic Deep Purple line-up with Ritchie Blackmore and Ian Gillan, and such a legendary song that set the scene and inspired so many rock bands. Plus Ian Paice, Roger Glover, and of course Jon Lord on keys... What's not to love?"

DARREN WHARTON, DARE/THIN LIZZY

IAN PAICE SAYS

"People always ask whether after so many times down the years I'm sick to death of playing *Smoke On The Water*. If we played it the same every night, yeah, I would be. But I'm not. We [as a band] have gone through so many permutations, but I've arrived at a template. It's almost become like

'Smooowke, on the waaaater...'
Ian Gillan on fire in
Copenhagen, Denmark, 1972.



a scored piece of music; you can even change the tempo by a beat or two. Yes, it's similar [to what has come before], but it's just for that particular night. It's never quite the same."

Lazy

(Machine Head, 1972)

"When Aerosmith first started out we lived in an apartment together. This was right when *Machine Head* came out, and that album was on the record player so much we almost wore it out. I really loved *Lazy*. It was such a statement. The song's beginning was so deceptive, you had no idea what was coming. It builds and builds and builds, and then all of a sudden Ritchie Blackmore enters the picture. It keeps on delivering those surprises, and when the words come in you just think: 'Holy cow.' *Lazy* is an epic song, and it never, ever gets old."

BRAD WHITFORD, AEROSMITH

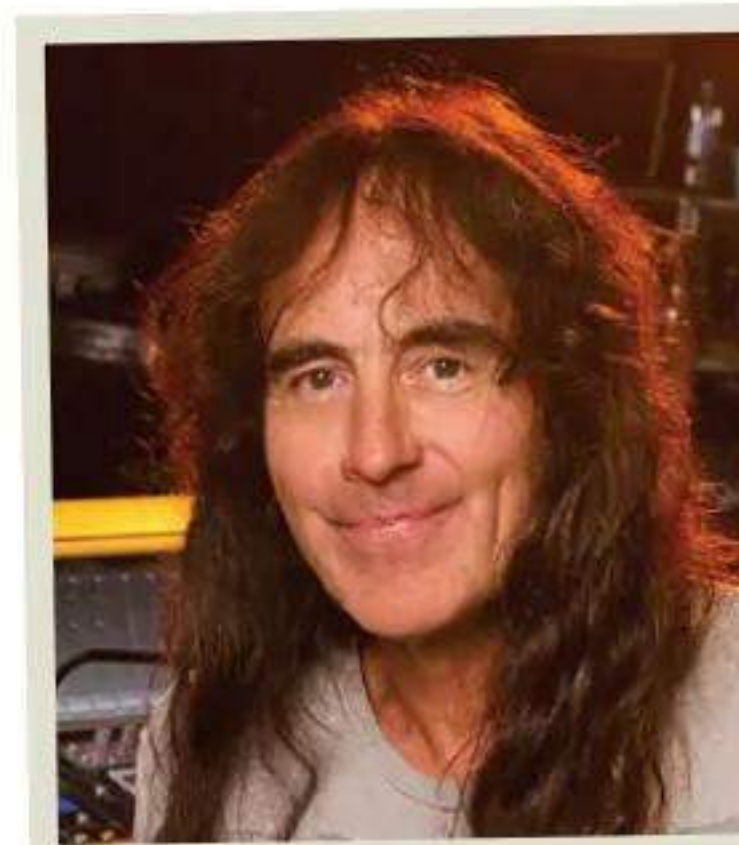
"*Machine Head* is my favourite album, and I love the tracks *Never Before* and *Highway Star*, but probably one of my fave all-time tracks is *Lazy*. It starts off with an impromptu jam and then mutates into a super-cool smokin' groove. Epic stuff! The playing just feels so good; it's something that's becoming lost these days within so many bands using editing, ProTools and computer trickery.

"I was once in a karaoke bar in Japan with my in-laws, and picked *Highway Star* as the track, and I started singing it. About halfway through, I realised just how high the vocal was becoming and everyone was laughing at me in the bar. And it was about five minutes long. A bit of an

epic fail. I had to drown myself in sushi and sake to nurse my wounds.

ACE, SKUNK ANANSIE

Machine Head, 1972



"It's impossible for me to choose my favourite Deep Purple track. I grew up listening to *Machine Head* and *Made In Japan*. They were such important records for me. I mean, *Machine Head* alone has *Smoke*

On The Water, *Highway Star* and *Space Truckin'* on it. And then you get to hear those tracks, and more, as live versions on the *Made In Japan* album, and they're even bigger. Purple were such a powerful band, with great songwriting and performances, both in the studio and in concert. They were definitely an influence for all of us in Maiden, in our different ways."

STEVE HARRIS, IRON MAIDEN

"I can't pick just one song – it's got to be the whole of *Machine Head*. I always loved those über-chunky riffs, the keyboards that drove the machine without smothering it in cheese, a pounding rhythm section, and those awesome vox and blistering leads. It had all of the ingredients to propel a thirteen-year-old kid – me – into a blissful life of rebellion. The *Machine Head* album was one of the main catalysts in my future musical endeavours. Long live Deep Purple!"

AL JOURGENSEN, MINISTRY

DEEP PURPLE



Fasten your seat belts: Glenn Hughes, Ian Paice, David Coverdale, Ritchie Blackmore and Jon Lord with their plane on the 1974 US tour.

time I heard that double bass drum [imitates the intro to *Fireball*] it was like a fucking meteor flew into the side of my house. You have to understand that during that era that was zero rock'n'roll in Sweden. Then I got *In Rock*, which was fucking insane. My life was changed."

YNGWIE MALMSTEEN

"I've always loved the version of *Lazy* that appeared on the double live album *Made In Japan*. It's a great showcase for the depth of musicianship of the Mk II line-up. It's pretty much a jam. After a quick tune-up there's a spectacular ring modulated organ solo, followed by some guitar noodling hinting at the riff to come. Then the jam starts for real and it is just so exciting. There's even a little humour injected at one point. The fact that Purple had been playing together non-stop for so long is evident in how tight this all feels."

BEN MATTHEWS, THUNDER

Space Truckin' (Live)

(*Made In Japan*, 1972)

"I grew up a massive fan of Deep Purple, and like so many musicians the first riff I learned was *Smoke On The Water*. Later on, Airbourne supported them, which was an incredible honour.

"I'm not going to pick *Smoke*, I'm going with *Space Truckin'* – but it's got to be the long version from *Made In Japan*. It took up a whole side of vinyl. What a fucking incredible piece of music."

JOEL O'KEEFE, AIRBOURNE



Woman From Tokyo

(*Who Do We Think We Are!*, 1973)

"*Woman From Tokyo* was the first time I ever heard distorted Hammond organ and distorted guitar doing two different things while working together. For a long time I tried to reverse-engineer that. I first attempted it on our second album, and I think I got close on our third album, where there's lots of Hammond and lots of guitar, and they're both complementing each other. These are two mid-range instruments that are kind of purposed to do the same thing. If you can work them into a song with that kind of thickness and without them masking each other and becoming a mess, that's the trick. I think Deep Purple got that right first among all heavy rock bands."

BRENDAN B BROWN, WHEATUS

DEEP PURPLE



MADE IN JAPAN

Child In Time (Live)

(*Made In Japan*, 1972)



"My choice can be very close to being a two-way tie – I love *Burn* almost as much. But I'm going to go with *Child In Time*.

As a song it's painfully simple, but it's also devastating. The live

version on *Made In Japan* is even more devastating. At the beginning it just simmers, and Gillan just kills it on the vocals. And then it kicks in to show what the band can do – everybody gets their chance at that. I can only think of two bands in that style that retained their popularity after replacing lead singers: Van Halen with David Lee Roth and Sammy Hagar, and then Purple

transitioning into the years with David Coverdale and Glenn [Hughes]. Those personnel changes are so hard to pull off.

"I believe it's retired from the set, which is no real surprise. I'm not sure how old Ian Gillan is; maybe he's like Glenn, seventy-one or seventy-two? [He's seventy-eight – Ed.] But imagine having to repeat a trapeze highwire act that you could pull off at twenty-two, fifty years later. There's no shame in that [dropping it from the show].

"Listen, you want to hear *Child In Time*? Go to *Made In Japan*, it's track number two."

JOE BONAMASSA

Lazy (Live)

(*Made In Japan*, 1972)

The first album I got was *Fireball*, at the age of eight. The title track is so amazing, and it doesn't even have a guitar solo. But I also love *Speed King*. I'm a bit unusual in that I love the album *Machine Head*, but I got *Made In Japan* first, so it's the live versions of those songs that I prefer. When I heard the studio versions they sounded a little tame – great, obviously, but still a little lame.

"For that reason I'm going to go with that incredible version of *Lazy* from *Made In Japan*. But I've also got to mention *Demon's Eye* [from *Fireball*], and *Fireball* itself. Also *Speed King*, and *Pictures Of Home*, *Child In Time* [laughs]... just about all of them, basically.

"Purple's music from that early era had such a great impact upon me. I grew up in a country [Sweden] that had no radio, TV or video – this was in the seventies. Before hearing Purple, the only thing I knew was John Mayall's *Bluesbreakers*, which my mother had on cassette and I loved. The first



Burn

(Burn, 1974)



"There are a lot of bands I've appreciated but not necessarily embraced, and Purple was one of those bands. They were not my cup of tea. I knew they were great players, but they just didn't connect

with me emotionally. I admitted that to David Coverdale when we met.

"I preferred what they did when David and Glenn came in, as opposed to the Ian Gillan years. *Burn* was the pinnacle of what I liked about them. The lead singing was great, and that vocal interplay between David and Glenn was very special. I appreciated the songwriting more. The first time I heard the song *Burn*, it was almost cinematic. I thought it was really great."

PAUL STANLEY, KISS

"Ritchie Blackmore was my first guitar hero – he had that white Stat and was so cool. Like every clichéd young guitar player, the first song I worked out was *Smoke On The Water*. But I would say *Burn* is my favourite. The riff was just killer. The singing was so great. Actually, just a couple of days ago I was on YouTube watching Chad Smith do *Burn* with Glenn Hughes in some club, and I was gonna text him and say: 'That was the third song I ever learnt on guitar, when I was eleven years old.'"

MIKE MCCREADY, PEARL JAM

"There are a dozen songs of theirs that I could choose, but *Burn* is so great. Obviously the riff is what makes the song stand out, but I love how up-tempo it is. I adore the way that Ritchie Blackmore and Jon Lord go back and forth, plus the vocal interaction between David Coverdale and Glenn Hughes. *Burn* is such an epic track. It shows off everything that I love so much about Deep Purple."

SCOTT IAN, ANTHRAX

"The first Deep Purple song I listened to was *Burn*. I was still a kid and completely new to that whole kind of music. I fell in love with *Burn* due to the combination of the song and the two lead vocalists, Coverdale and Hughes, who were surprisingly great. I wasn't used to that. And then came the classically themed middle part of



GLENN HUGHES

Purple's 'other' bassist's hot half-dozen. (He sang a bit too.)

Burn

(Burn, 1974)

"We were at Clearwell Castle when Ritchie said: 'We should write song called *Burn*.' He had the idea of the title already. The five of us wrote that song together in the Castle's crypt in the key of 'G'; Jon's Bach instrumental, inserting the riff... it felt magical. *Burn* is such a great, dramatic rock track. It stops, starts, turns around, and there's the Bach influence and vocal harmonies. It was completely different to anything that Deep Purple had ever done before. It ticked all the boxes of those that questioned whether the new line-up could work."

You Can't Do It Right (With The One You Love)

(Stormbringer, 1974)

"Ritchie was probably thinking about leaving even before we started making *Stormbringer*, so he didn't arrive with a lot of material. Jon, David and I wrote some songs that were quite different for Purple – very different, in fact. This one was a great vehicle for David and I to do our vocal duet thing."

Love Don't Mean A Thing

(Stormbringer, 1974)

"Ritchie later referred to our songs as 'shoeshine music', but it's important for me to state that he played so well on them. I do know that Ritchie wanted Mk III of Purple to be a different genre than Mk II, so whether or not *Stormbringer* was shoeshine music, well... I guess he got his wish. And by the way, the band played so well on these particular songs."

Sail Away

(Burn, 1974)

"We were still at Clearwell Castle, and it may have been the second or third song for the album. For me, having been in Trapeze, I very much identified with the song's sense of groove. To this day I still love singing and playing it."

This Time Around/ Owed To A 'G'

(Come Taste The Band, 1975)

"For *Come Taste The Band*, my brother Tommy Bolin had replaced Ritchie. Jon and I wrote *This Time Around* alone in the studio in the early hours of the morning. Jon was playing this really cool movement and I started to sing along. I had no idea of the lyrics, they just tumbled out. The song wrote itself in half an hour. We got Martin [Birch, producer] out of bed to make a demo, and the following day we recorded it. My beautiful moment with Jon which led to the song is something I will cherish forever."

Gettin' Tighter

(Come Taste The Band, 1975)

"*Come Taste The Band* was written at my home. Tommy was living with me at the time. We took it to the rest of the guys and they loved it. I still play it as a homage to Tommy. In fact it's the only one of my legacy songs with Purple that I have played at every concert since December 4, 1976 [the date on which Tommy Bolin died of a heroin overdose at just 25 years old]."

Blackmore and Jon Lord. That became a big, big inspiration for me and I never forgot the moment.”
MAT SINNER, PRIMAL FEAR

“It’s hard for me to not pick *Smoke On The Water*, which has the most iconic guitar riff of all time, but *Burn* is right up there as well. It has so many different ingredients, delivered by the voice of rock. No, make that two voices of rock: Hughes and Coverdale. *Burn* is just insane.”

DAVID DRAIMAN, DISTURBED

“It’s got to be *Burn*, for two reasons. Firstly, Purple were touring that album when I saw them for the first time, at the Capitol in Cardiff in 1974. That gig blew my bloody head off. They opened with *Burn*. It’s such an incredible song. Which brings me to my second point. Coverdale’s isolated vocals are out there on the internet, and they’re really something else. The whole band is off the scale, guitar, keyboards, bass and drums. It’s just a slamming hard rock song.”

PHIL CAMPBELL, PHIL CAMPBELL & THE BASTARD SONS

“I first heard Deep Purple when I was seven years old, on my dad’s record player, and their sound has greatly influenced the way I write songs. *Burn* drew me into the rock world with its energy and raw power. When I had the opportunity to support Glenn Hughes on tour a few years ago, he played *Burn* at the end of his set. Watching him perform it live with the band was so memorable. Deep Purple’s classic guitar riffs, tones and solos, played by real musicians in the old-school way, is completely timeless.”

LAURENCE JONES

“*Burn* was the second Deep Purple track I heard after *Smoke On The Water*, and it blew me out of the water. I was instantly floored by Ian Paice’s drumming, which is out of the blocks! As a young drummer I couldn’t work out what was being played – so many fills! It’s absolute madness and was so inspiring. As the song progresses, everyone in the band shines in their own way. The bass and keys parts are amazing, and Blackmore’s guitar solo is unbelievable, while Coverdale’s vocals are off chain. The main riff of the song is so hooky too. Love it!

ARYA GOGGIN, SKINDRED

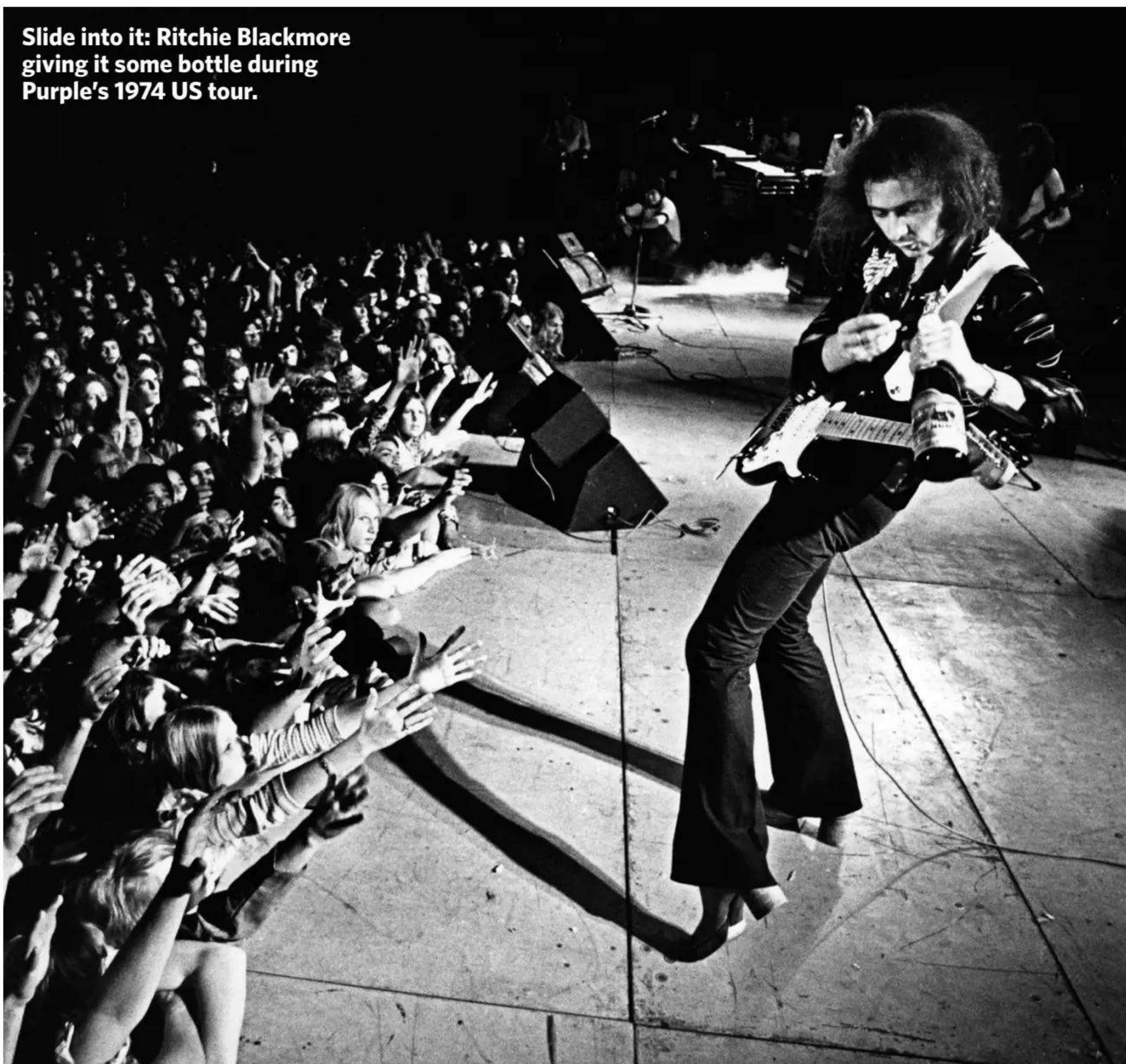
IAN PAICE SAYS

“*Burn* is one of those songs that I tend to forget about, because I don’t play it very often for obvious reasons [it was recorded by the Mk III line-up with David Coverdale and Glenn Hughes]. I can only play it when I’m working with friends in covers and heritage bands.

“We were [writing the album] at Clearwell Castle and Ritchie had this riff. We kept on playing it [as the song was developed], and I was getting bored shitless: ‘C’mon, guys... where is this going?’ Every time we reached the verse, things would fall to pieces. I just started soloing, in time, flapping around the kit, and everybody loved it and we moved on, and that was crucial.

“When we recorded the song, I think I did it in three takes. The first was absolute chaos, the second was the master [that was used], and with the third I said I thought I could do it better. But

Slide into it: Ritchie Blackmore giving it some bottle during Purple’s 1974 US tour.



I couldn’t. Is the version on the album perfect? No. But then again it is perfect – it captured the moment perfectly. The drums are totally mad, but again... it works. That’s the glory of rock’n’roll – it breaks all the rules. Though now it seems those rules are being put back in place again, more’s the pity. Stop limiting your options.”

Sail Away

(*Burn*, 1974)

“What a groove. What a riff. And the vocals, shared between David Coverdale and Glenn Hughes, are just awesome. *Burn* has always been my favourite album by Deep Purple, and *Sail Away* is its best track.”

JONA TEE, H.E.A.T

IAN PAICE SAYS

“I always loved *Sail Away*. It came from us [as a band] trying to get Ritchie’s take on *Superstition* [by Stevie Wonder, released two years earlier]. We wanted that very angular riff, to convey a similar mood. A lot of people didn’t get it at the time because it was too funky. No, it wasn’t rock’n’roll, but I loved the song’s feel.”

Mistreated

(*Burn*, 1974)

“*Mistreated* really resonates with me because the style of it reminded me of bands like Free and Bad Company. My favourite incarnation of Deep Purple was the Mk III line-up with David Coverdale and Glenn Hughes. As a teenager, me and King King bassist Zander Greenfields spent

many a late night watching the 1974 California Jam concert, and it wasn’t until years later that I realised how much that show influenced me. Coverdale’s voice on *Mistreated* reminds me of Paul Rodgers. They have similar phrasing and such raw power, it’s amazing.”

ALAN NIMMO, KING KING

“It’s weird, because before I heard the real version of *Mistreated* [by Deep Purple], I knew it as a song played by Ritchie Blackmore and Ronnie James Dio on the Rainbow live record [*On Stage*, 1977]. I thought it was brilliant, but I mistook it for a Rainbow song. I was just a kid, collecting records.

“I knew all about Deep Purple at the time, but I had not got into the Mk III line-up yet. When I heard the real version, featuring Glenn and David, along with Jon and Ritchie and Paicey, my appreciation kicked up to a whole other level.”

“Many years later I got to play *Mistreated* many times on stage with Glenn, and the coolest thing was that it was never the same. Glenn makes that song special and different every time he plays it. I also went to see him play it with Søren [Andersen, guitarist] on his Classic Deep Purple tour. Basically, every one of those versions were so good they should have been freeze-framed as a unique moment in time.”

DOUG ALDRICH, THE DEAD DAISIES

IAN PAICE SAYS

“Another of those songs sung by Coverdale, I always enjoy playing *Mistreated* when I get the chance. It’s not a complex song, it’s just interesting. The point of any song is not how clever you make it, but whether or not it’s a good piece of music, and *Mistreated* is definitely one of those.”



A laugh a minute at a photo session in Hamburg, Germany, September 1984.



The Gypsy

(Stormbringer, 1974)

"To pick a ballad as my favourite song by Deep Purple, a band with no shortage of genre-defining heavy riffs, could be considered sacrilegious, but *Stormbringer* is my favourite of the band's albums, and *The Gypsy* is a wonderful piece of music.

"In addition to the beautiful vocal harmonising of David Coverdale and Glenn Hughes throughout, and Ian Paice's masterful drumming, particularly in the long fade-out, you get what I think is one of Ritchie Blackmore's finest moments in his sublime harmonised slide solo – not to mention Jon Lord's gentle but evocative keyboard accompaniment underneath."

"So yes, although there are plenty of other worthy, heavier choices, which I'm sure will be represented here, for me *The Gypsy* is the winner."

JIM MATHEOS, FATES WARNING

Soldier Of Fortune

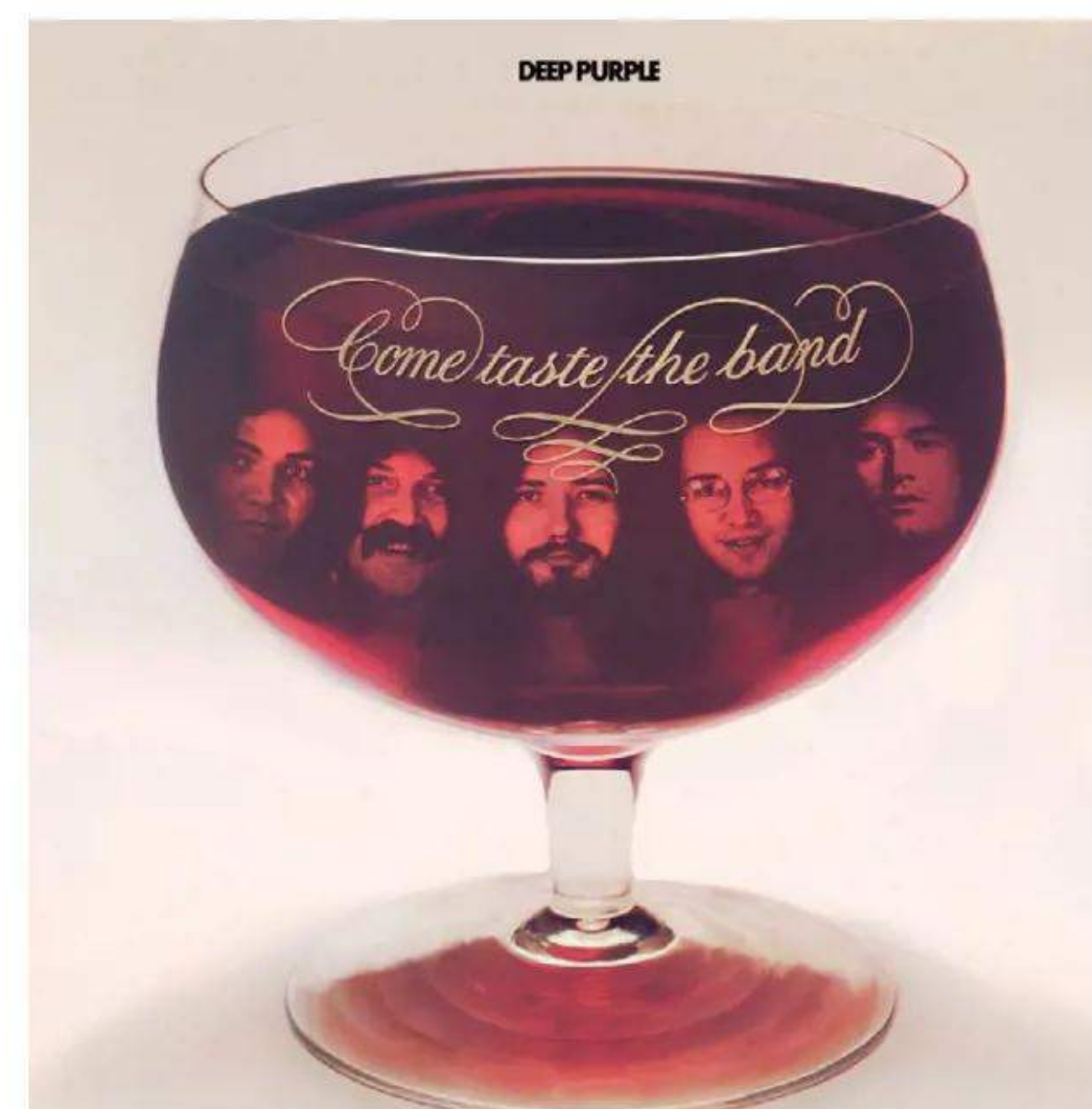
(Stormbringer, 1974)

"What a beautiful, beautiful song. *Soldier Of Fortune* is so brilliantly put together by Coverdale and Blackmore. After *Mama's Boys*, I now teach as well as make my own music, and when I play that song to my students they are always blown away. When you've got a younger generation going around and singing *Soldier Of Fortune*, that's a beautiful thing. When you can go from a song like *Burn* to a tender ballad like *Soldier Of Fortune*, it shows what amazingly versatile musicians Deep Purple were, and remain."

PAT McMANUS, MAMA'S BOYS

GLENN HUGHES SAYS

"As I remember, *Soldier Of Fortune* came together while *Stormbringer* was being recorded at Musicland Studio in Germany; I don't think we had it at The Castle [Clearwell]. *Soldier Of Fortune* was born in a moment between David and Ritchie, a bit like the one between Jon Lord and myself [that led to *This Time Around*]. I consider it one of David's best ever vocal performances. It's testament to how great his voice was at that period, especially in a lower register."



Drifter

(Come Taste The Band, 1975)

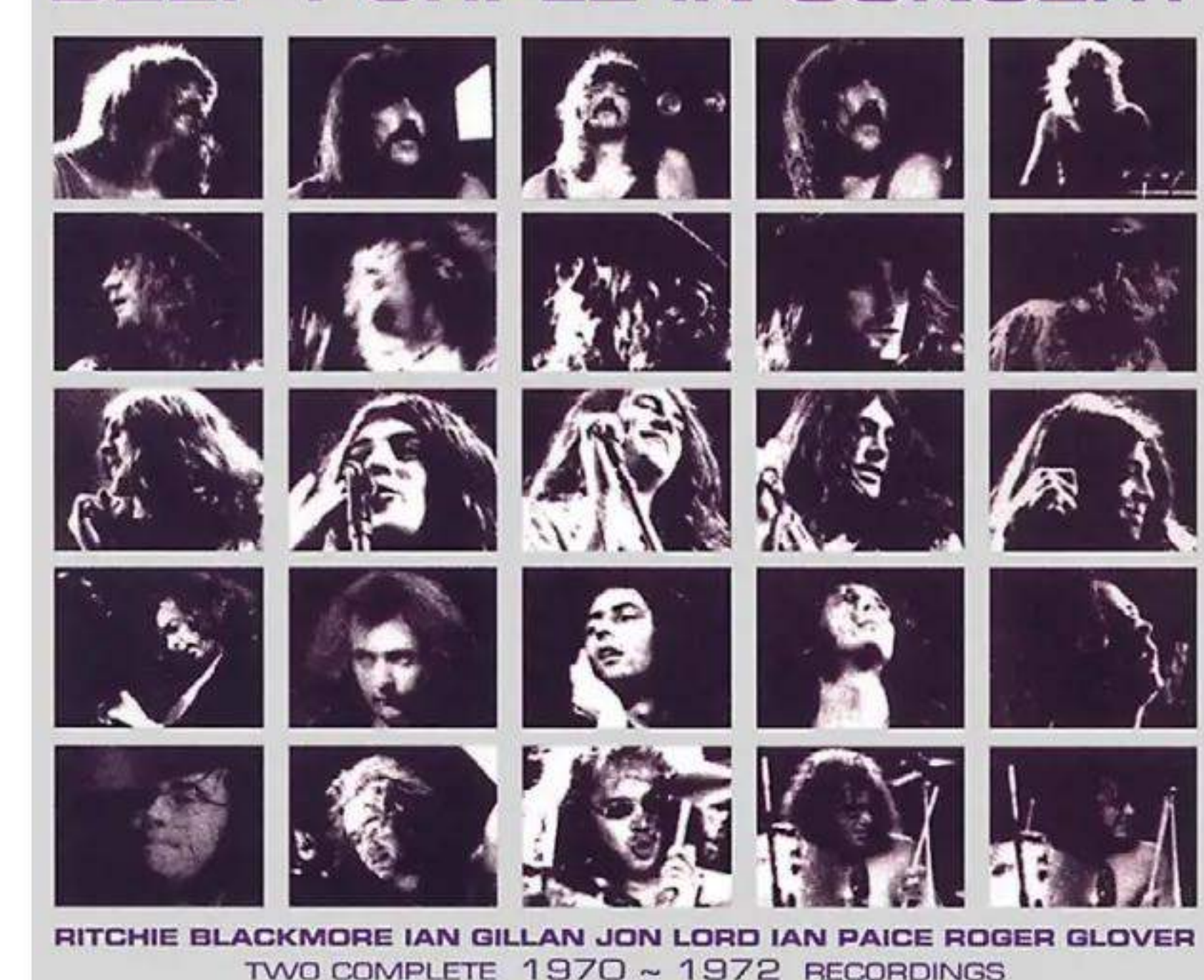
"*Drifter* has that laid-back funky groove, yet the song still retains a serious rock energy, throwing in that double-time here and there and on the ending. It's a great track all round. An example of early funk-rock right there!"

DAN REED, DAN REED NETWORK

GLENN HUGHES SAYS

"*Drifter* is a great, funky romp, and *Come Taste The Band* a wonderful, very different album. Each of the albums David and I did with Purple were different. *Burn* had been classic-sounding, but with Ritchie edging away, with *Stormbringer* we moved on. And then by *Come Taste The Band* there were three new guys. Just like we hadn't wanted to duplicate *Machine Head* with *Burn*, nobody sought to duplicate *Burn* on *Stormbringer*. As David [Bowie] constantly told me, a great band or artist must keep on changing."

DEEP PURPLE IN CONCERT



RITCHIE BLACKMORE IAN GILLAN JON LORD IAN PAICE ROGER GLOVER
TWO COMPLETE 1970 ~ 1972 RECORDINGS

Wring That Neck (Live)

(Deep Purple In Concert, 1980)



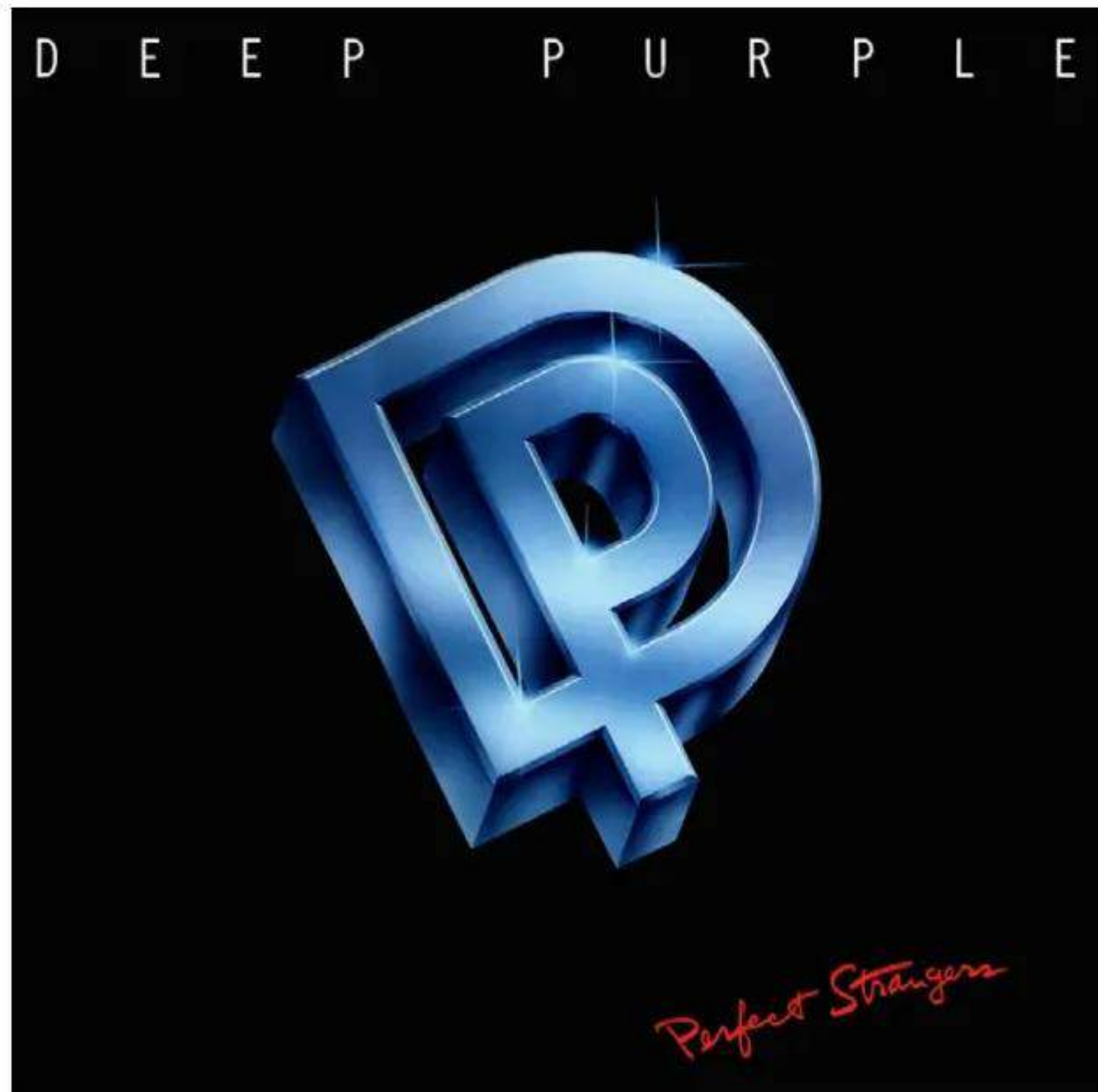
"My first album of theirs was a double album of tracks recorded live for the BBC [in 1970 and '72]. I had a really long version of *Wring That Neck* that took up most of the first side. I loved

that, because Ritchie Blackmore and Jon Lord ➤

DEEP PURPLE

went head-to-head in battle for almost twenty minutes. I fucking loved to hear those guys blowing away. Together and apart they were phenomenal musicians – great tone, great sound, great players and great feel. I'm going to go with *Wring That Neck* live as a somewhat obscure but very genuine choice.”

STEVEN WILSON



Perfect Strangers

(*Perfect Strangers*, 1984)

“That sustained intro from Jon Lord, and when Ian Paice’s drum beat kicks in... Woah, what a brilliant song. I’m a long-term Deep Purple fan, and of Ritchie Blackmore in particular. They’re a band that we in Queensrÿche listened to a lot in our formative years. Their playing is always brilliant and they made so many timeless, classic albums.”

MICHAEL WILTON, QUEENSRÿCHE



“I consider *Perfect Strangers* one of Deep Purple’s most mature and finest works. It embodies all of the most positive aspects of the band. It has a great riff, and the lyrics are very poignant because they were talking about themselves.

“At that point Deep Purple were playing in Australia, as were we [Jethro Tull], and I met them at a hotel in Sydney. [Having just reunited] there was a great sense of unease. I remember taking to Ian Gillan at the hotel bar, and as soon as Ritchie walked in he vanished. They didn’t really communicate. I went to see them play, and there was a major tantrum on stage, Ritchie got really upset about something and smashed his guitar.

“My perception of Ritchie is that behind all of the bravado he’s a bit of a sensitive soul. He’s quite tormented because, musically speaking, his ambitions always lay in something that was far beyond the remit of Deep Purple. And of course he finally achieved that after finding a partner in the rather unusual form of Candice Night. I played on their first album [*Shadow Of The Moon*, 1997], and was happy to see that Blackmore’s Night gave Richie a whole new direction in life. It all worked out in the end.”

IAN ANDERSON, JETHRO TULL



Deep Purple 1995 vintage: (clockwise from top left) Ian Gillan, Jon Lord, Ian Paice, Steve Morse, Roger Glover.

ROGER GLOVER SAYS

“Ian and I used bits and pieces of poetry to write those lyrics. We had an idea about a soul being reborn and being trapped in a new body. The other person knows you’re there, but they can’t do anything about it. It sounds strange, but it is strange. It was only when the song was finished that we realised it is about Deep Purple.”



Sometimes I Feel Like Screaming

(*Purpendicular*, 1996)

I’m a big fan of Purple’s era with Steve Morse. Blackmore was a huge influence, but I wouldn’t

call myself a purist. *Purpendicular*, their first album with Morse, was the best since *Burn*, and *Sometimes I Feel Like Screaming* is as good as any they ever wrote. Morse brought new life to the band, and it sounds like the boys had to up their game for the first time in a while, creatively as songwriters and technically as musicians. This song flows in a way that makes it seem like it fell from the sky as a finished piece. Gillan’s abstract yet engaging lyrics blend melody with those screams, fitting perfectly over Paicey and Glover’s swinging rhythm. It’s classic Purple.

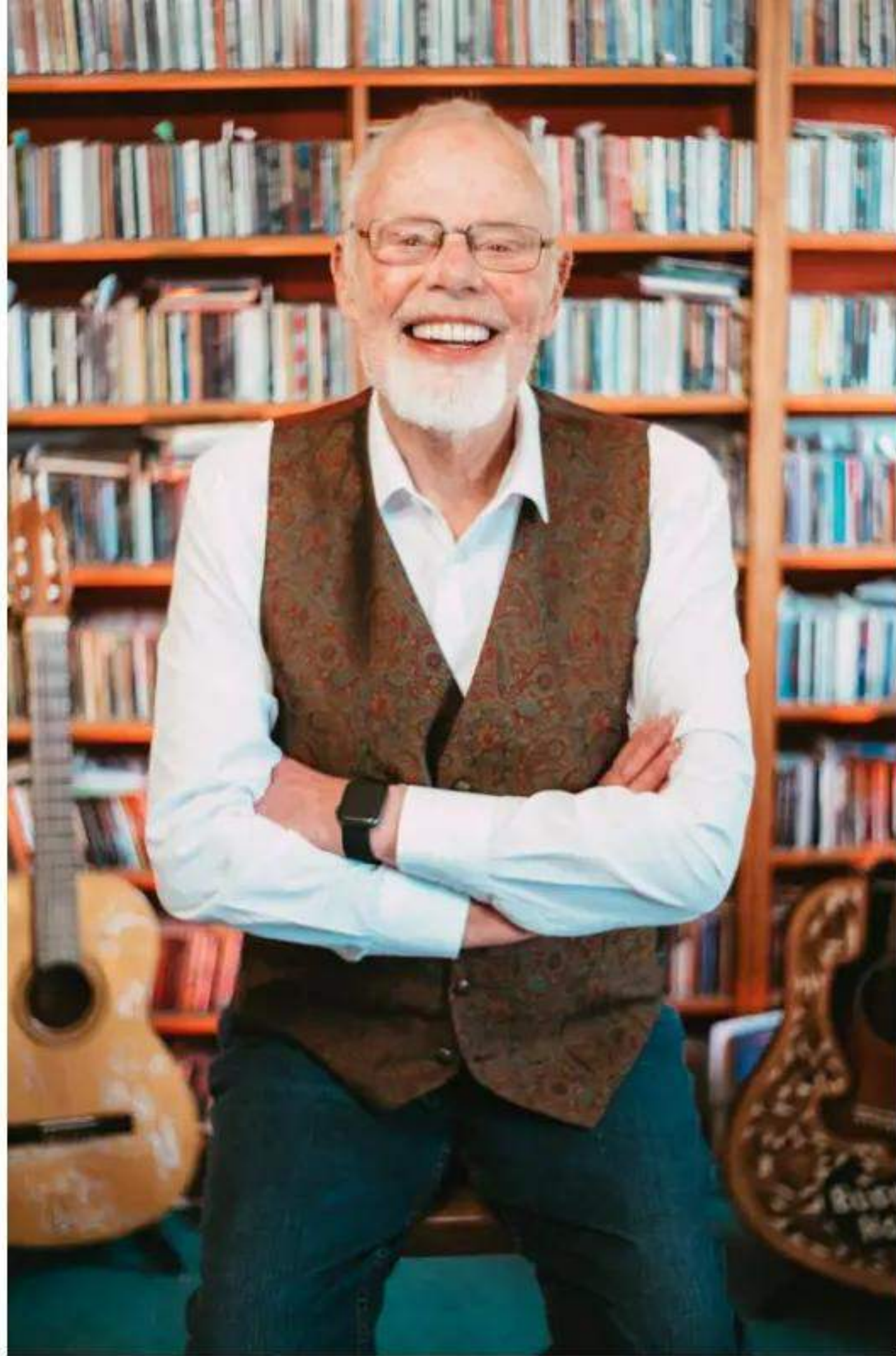
“The star of the show is the beautiful guitar hook, featured over Jon Lord’s meandering cadence. Morse is tasteful and restrained, but he allows just enough of his technical prowess to break through; confident yet respectful to the Purple sound. Those were not easy shoes to fill, but Steve brought the band back to the top.

“*Purpendicular* has many such tunes – *Ted The Mechanic*, *Somebody Stole My Guitar* – but *Sometimes* is the sound of five stellar musicians bringing the best out of each other. Flawless!”

ADAM THISTLETHWAITE, MASSIVE WAGONS

ROGER GLOVER SAYS

“*Purpendicular* was one of those albums that, to me, was perfect. It was a magical time. We couldn’t stop writing, and in a whole different way than we’d done with Ritchie in the band. We reinvented ourselves – in the same way as we’re now doing with Simon [McBride].”



The Soundtrack Of My Life

Broadcasting legend

'Whispering' Bob Harris on the records, artists and gigs that are of lasting significance to him.

Interview: Jo Kendall



BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: ALLAN TANNENBAUM/GETTY

He was championed by John Peel on BBC Radio 1. Then in 1972 he became the 'Whispering' presenter of TV music show *The Old Grey Whistle Test*. Now Bob Harris is celebrating 25 years fronting the BBC's *Country* show, as well as turning 78, all while on tour with an event co-hosted by Colin Hall, based on Hall's book and documentary series *The Songs The Beatles Gave Away*.

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

That would be my mum and dad's record collection in the early fifties, pre-rock'n'roll, so Mantovani – a great favourite of mine – Johnny Mathis and Perry Como. We had a radiogram in the corner of the room, and when it was switched on it glowed like a warm fire. My mum listened to the radio all the time. That would be formative in terms of what I'm doing now.

THE FIRST SONG I BROADCAST

I was sitting in for John Peel on BBC Radio 1 on August 19, 1970. I had a brilliant producer called Jeff Griffin, who said to me: "You bring in the music, I'll teach you how to build a programme." I learned so much from him, he was so skilful. Our first choice was *Cinnamon Girl* by Neil Young, because I just loved it.

THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

I've been so lucky to hear important records arrive in real time. *Sgt Pepper* was an absolute game changer. There were some experimental groups at the time, such as Pink Floyd or Soft Machine, but what The Beatles and George Martin did with *Sgt Pepper* was bring every thread of creative energy together to push out the boundaries as far as technology would let them go. Twelve months later, in pop music and the industry, everything was different.

THE SINGER

Ben E King. He was with The Drifters, a genuinely groundbreaking black band who started as R&B/doo-wop, then were steered into the charts in a very creative way by their label, Atlantic. *There Goes My Baby* [1959] had an incredible new sound that was a combination of orchestration and atmosphere, all bound together by King's voice.

THE GUITAR HERO

Jimmy Page. He drove probably the greatest rock band that ever lived. I was fortunate to spend time touring with them in the States, and it was incredible to watch his artistry.

THE SONGWRITER

Country artist Lori McKenna. She's not a commercial writer, but it just so happens that a lot of her songs have been huge hits. One song of great warmth,

which we need so much of these days, is *Humble And Kind*, a sentiment that sums Lori up. She's become established as one of the top writers in Nashville.

THE BEST LIVE BAND OR ARTIST I'VE EVER SEEN

That's easy: Bruce Springsteen. I saw him at his first big showcase at the Roxy in Los Angeles in 1975, where everyone was there – George Harrison, David Bowie and some tennis stars such as Jimmy Connors. Then I saw him in New Haven in 1978, a four-hour show that we recorded for *Whistle Test*. This was the

best show I have ever seen for performance, energy, and the electricity of Springsteen when he was down in the audience. Afterwards he took us to a place nearby and got up on stage with the band and jammed until two a.m.!

MY GUILTY PLEASURE

I love this record, it's absolutely gorgeous – *Move Over Darling* by Doris Day. It's in no way a comment on my private life [laughs].

MY MOST UNDERRATED ACT

There's a lovely country artist from Northern Ireland called Catherine McGrath. She put a wonderful album out, *Talk Of This Town*, in 2018, which got to Number One in the Country chart.

THE BEST RECORD THAT I'VE APPEARED ON

David Bowie's *Memories Of A Free Festival* [1969]. It wasn't all hash and incense, though [laughs]. It was done in the early evening in Trident studio in London. I was there with my first wife, Sue, Marc Bolan and his first wife June, and David and Tony Visconti. We were sat on the floor singing: '*The sun machine is coming down, and we're gonna have a party*'. It was a lot of fun to do, and to hear back.

MY SATURDAY NIGHT PARTY RECORD

Anything by Blackberry Smoke. I love them. They're the Status Quo of country!

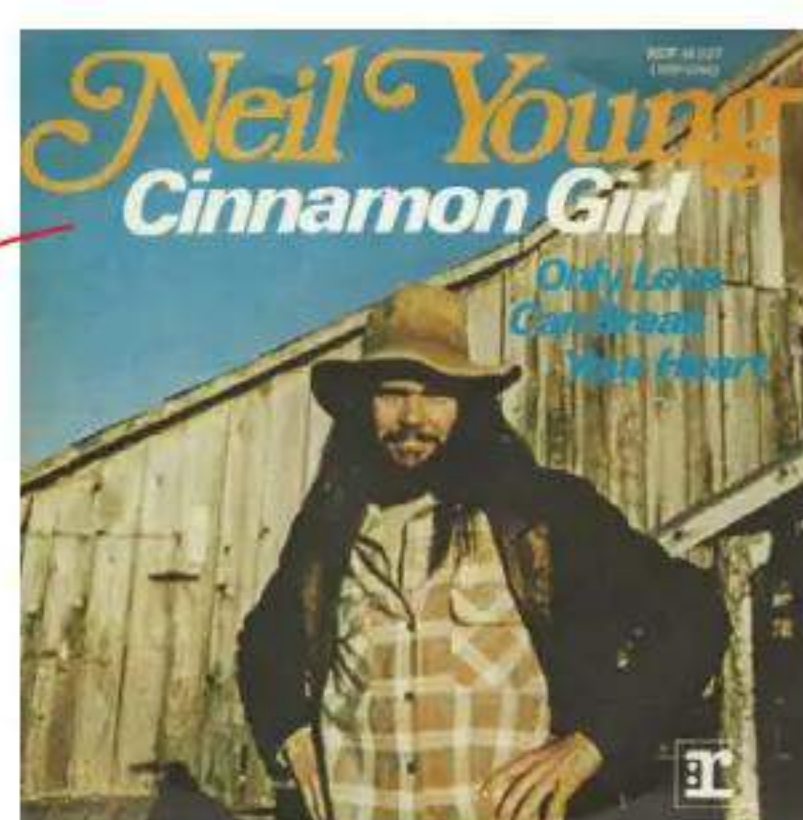
THE SONG THAT MAKES ME CRY

I'll pick something where the beauty of it makes me cry, not because it's sad: Lukas Nelson & The Promise Of The Real, *Just Outside Of Austin*. It's an appreciation of love and nature, and it has a connection, for me, with someone I care about. It became our song.

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

Ben E King again, and *Stand By Me*. It's a song about getting through things, we're all in this together. I'm an ambassador for Help Musicians, and during the pandemic, artists such as Roseanne Cash, Peter Dinklage, Rick Wakeman and more became the Whispering Bob All-Stars, recording this as a fundraising track. It's still raising money for musicians now. 🎧

For more information on 'Whispering' Bob, head to bobharris.org



"Springsteen in 1978 was the best show I've ever seen for performance and energy."

POWER

When it came to making the follow-up to 1983's *Piece Of Mind* album, **Iron Maiden** knew they needed to come up with something a bit special. That was *Powerslave*.

Words: **Mick Wall** Photos: **Ross Halfin**



PLAY



In January 1984, when Iron Maiden arrived at Le Chalet Hotel in Jersey, in the Channel Islands to begin writing material for their next album, they were five men on a mission. The previous 12 months had seen them accomplish a successful career transition from standard bearers for the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal into internationally recognised rock stars with their first headline tour of America, including prestige shows at New York's Madison Square Garden and Los Angeles's Long Beach Arena – and their first US Top 20 album with *Piece Of Mind*. Now it was time to bring the hammer down.

“For me, *Piece Of Mind* was the best album we'd done up to that point,” Maiden bassist and founder Steve Harris told me. “People still talked about [previous Maiden album] *The Number Of The Beast*, because of the title track and *Run To The Hills*, which were both big hits, and because it was Bruce's [Dickinson, singer] first album [with Maiden]. But *Piece Of Mind* was the one for me.”

The first Maiden album to feature the classic line-up of Harris, Dickinson, guitarists Dave Murray and Adrian Smith and drummer Nicko McBrain, *Piece Of Mind* was also the first record to fully integrate Dickinson as a songwriter.

He had written *Run To The Hills*, Maiden's first Top 10 single, but it was on *Piece Of Mind* that he began the songwriting partnership with Smith that would flourish more fully over the coming years, not least on the bugling, Dio-esque *Flight Of Icarus*, one of the album's two chart singles.

“*Piece Of Mind* was the best album we'd done up to that point.”

— Steve Harris —

However, it was the other song Dickinson co-wrote with Smith that really demonstrated what they would bring to Maiden: *Sunlight And Steel*, which introduced an extra-large dose of rock groove to Maiden's trademark galloping metal.

“I never saw myself as a heavy-metal speed merchant,” Smith told me. “Definitely not a shredder! I grew up listening to Eric Clapton and the sort of blues rock that bands like Zeppelin and Purple were doing. I loved rock guitar, but it had to have melody.”

“We both grew up loving *Machine Head* by Deep Purple,” Dickinson recalled. “It was definitely part of the appeal that Ian Gillan was such a great singer and Ritchie Blackmore was such an awe-inspiring guitarist, but it was the songs that mattered to us most – all the ones that got you first time, like *Smoke On The Water* and *Highway Star*. So when Adrian and I first started writing together it was natural we would gravitate more to that kind of thing.”

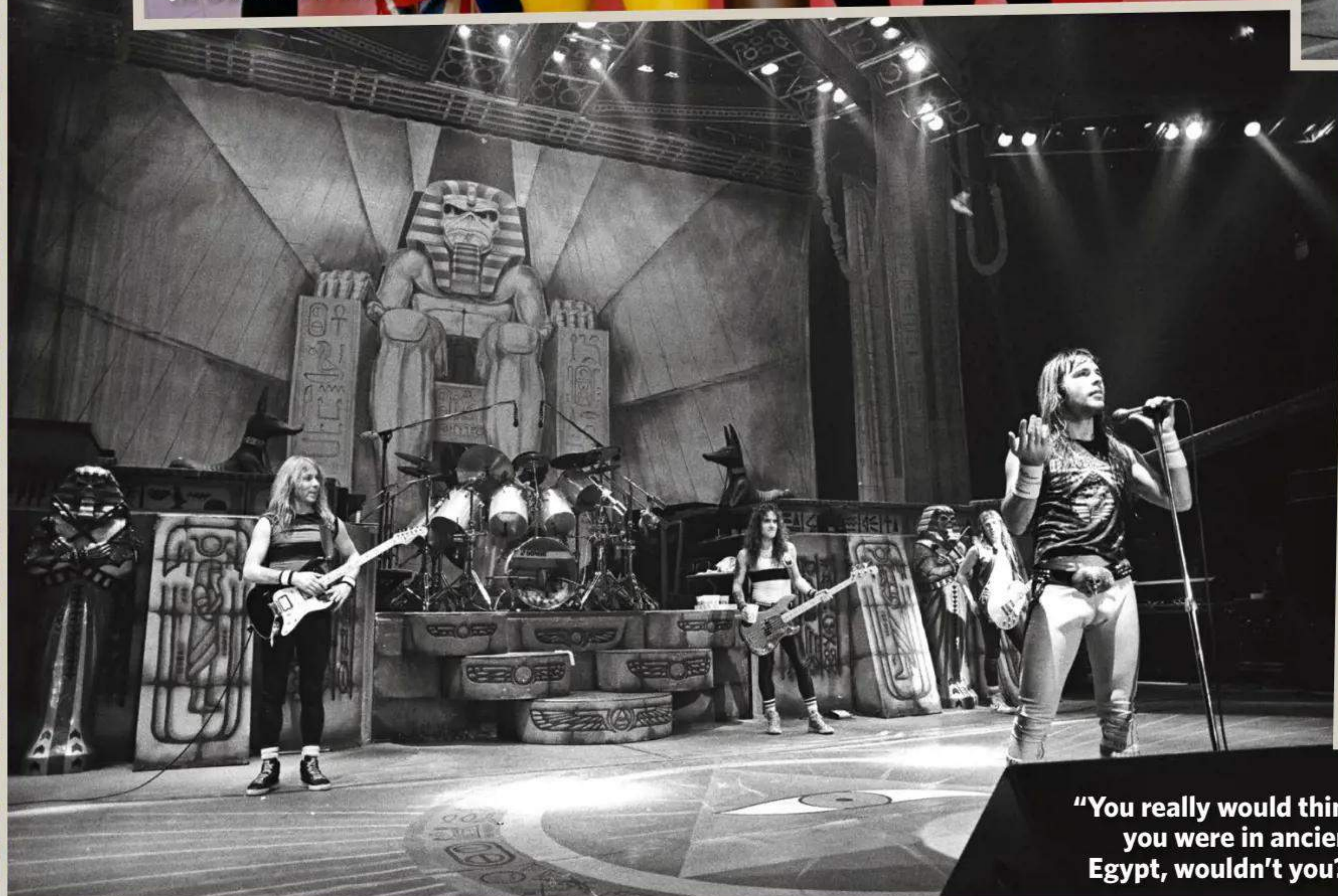
Steve Harris, of course, had his own mathematical notions of groove. Groove was good. Melody was welcomed, but unless it was sewn into the fabric of something more complex and high-wire, it simply didn't resonate for ➤



The spandex years.
(It was 1984, after all.)



"It's behind you!"
Steve Harris and his
old mate Eddie.



"You really would think
you were in ancient
Egypt, wouldn't you?"



him. Harris had never really been into singles. He was into prog.

The evidence had been there from the band's debut album, in 1980, on the seven-minute-plus *Phantom Of The Opera*. It was there in excelsis on *Hallowed Be Thy Name* from *Number Of The Beast*, and as the epic grand finale to *Piece Of Mind*, in *To Tame A Land*. All epics written solely by Harris.

As founder, leader, chief songwriter and ultimate decision maker, 'Arry, as everyone except Bruce called him, ensured that Maiden's chief focus, musically, would always remain on the pure, unsullied force of the hardest, fastest, most technically acrobatic and undeniably heavy fucking metal you ever heard.

Frequent line-up changes – replacing a key guitarist, their drummer, even their singer – that would have killed the career of lesser titans seemed only to drive Maiden on. Harris was right: *Piece Of Mind* was their best album to date. All they had to do now was

follow it up with something at least as good, hopefully even better. No small task. Harris, though, refused to acknowledge that he and the band were under pressure.

"People kept talking about pressure, and looking back I can obviously see why. But the truth is I didn't really feel any at the time," he shrugged. "It wasn't arrogance. I just never

"I never saw myself as a heavy-metal speed merchant. Definitely not a shredder!"

Adrian Smith

worried about what we had done before or what other people – management, record companies, tour promoters, the music press – expected of us. Not when it came to writing new material.

"My priorities were simple. Number one, I have to like it. If I think something we've done is really good, then it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks. Number two, the fans have to like it. If I like it and the fans like it, that's all that ever

matters to me. The critics can say what they like after that, it won't matter to me."

Dickinson also felt blissfully unconstrained by the weight of expectation that now sat on Maiden's shoulders. Still only 25, as he later told me: "My main memory of writing songs in Jersey is of excitement. We'd just come off a really successful world tour, and as a band we were still at peak velocity, as it were. Meanwhile, we were stuck in this out-of-season hotel. It was too bloody cold to go out, and there was nowhere to go anyway." Plus, as Harris pointed out, "the

hotel bar was open round-the-clock and it was free, so we probably spent the first week or so getting pissed!"

Another factor adding to their collective oomph was that Maiden's fifth album would be their first with the

same line-up as its predecessor. Harris always dictated that ahead of any new album, they commit to a designated writing period, which in this case was six weeks. "I don't write on the road," he explained. "I prefer to be with the band in the studio."

However, Dickinson had already come up with the song that was to give the album its title and conceptual theme: *Powerslave*. According to



Murray and Harris give it some foot-on-the-monitor action.

Smith: "He'd done the *Piece Of Mind* tour with this horrible little four-track machine full of ideas, riffs, arrangements and whatever, and the Egyptian thing was on there. Everyone he spoke to about it was really taken by the theme, so that's where we went."

Dickinson had written the song *Powerslave* alone. But it was the rock monster he and Smith came up with one night in Jersey that broke new ground for Iron Maiden.

The guitarist had been working on the riff in his hotel room when Dickinson knocked on his door. "I played him the music. He started singing, and we had *2 Minutes To Midnight*. We wrote it in about twenty minutes.

"I could knock out stuff like that all day. But it didn't always fit into the kind of fantasy-horror thing that Maiden had going for them. In the early days I needed Bruce to help me make things more how Maiden would want them. *2 Minutes To Midnight* is a perfect example of that. I had the right riff and Bruce had the right words."

With a flashing switchblade riff that could have come from the first Montrose album, and a chorus from Deep Purple's *Burn*, *2 Minutes To Midnight* was joyous, almost gleeful. Yet the

nuclear-doomsday lyrics were almost comically bleak: lots of killing 'the unborn in the womb', and warnings of 'demon's seed' and 'children torn in two'. In 1984 this was heavy metal at its zenith.

"*2 Minutes To Midnight* deals with a very gory subject," Dickinson agreed, "and some of the lyrics are distinctly unpleasant. But that's just as it should be, because [nuclear war] is a very unpleasant subject."

2 Minutes To Midnight was the obvious choice as the first single from the album, and, sure enough, it became a sizeable UK hit, fizzing to No.12. It was Harris who came up with what became the second single, a red-hot slab of peak Maiden titled *Aces High*, a soulful call-to-arms in the tradition of *Where Eagles Dare* from *Piece...*, only punchier, angrier.

Aces High was heavy artillery bass and whiz-bang, Spitfire guitars, machine-gun drums and air-raid-siren

vocals. Sure enough, that single also roared into the UK Top 20.

The most important new number begun in Jersey, however, was Harris's monumental musical retelling of the 18th-century Samuel Taylor Coleridge gothic poem *The Rime Of The Ancient Mariner*. Coleridge was a notorious dope fiend, and *The Rime* is full of richly evocative verbiage about 'the wrath of spirits... from the land of mist and snow'. As a poem worth reading now, I wouldn't urge any hurry. Far too much about an albatross. Musically, however, in the hands of a dedicated metal music maestro like Harris, at 27 working at his absolute peak, Coleridge's trippy peregrinations took on a whole new dimension of gothic splendour – and horror.

The band sketched out another handful of songs in Jersey, but it wasn't until they arrived at Compass Points Studios in Nassau, in the Bahamas, with producer Martin Birch (or 'Pool Bully', as he would be credited) that things really began to cook.

It was clear from the start that the album's strength would centre on *2 Minutes To*

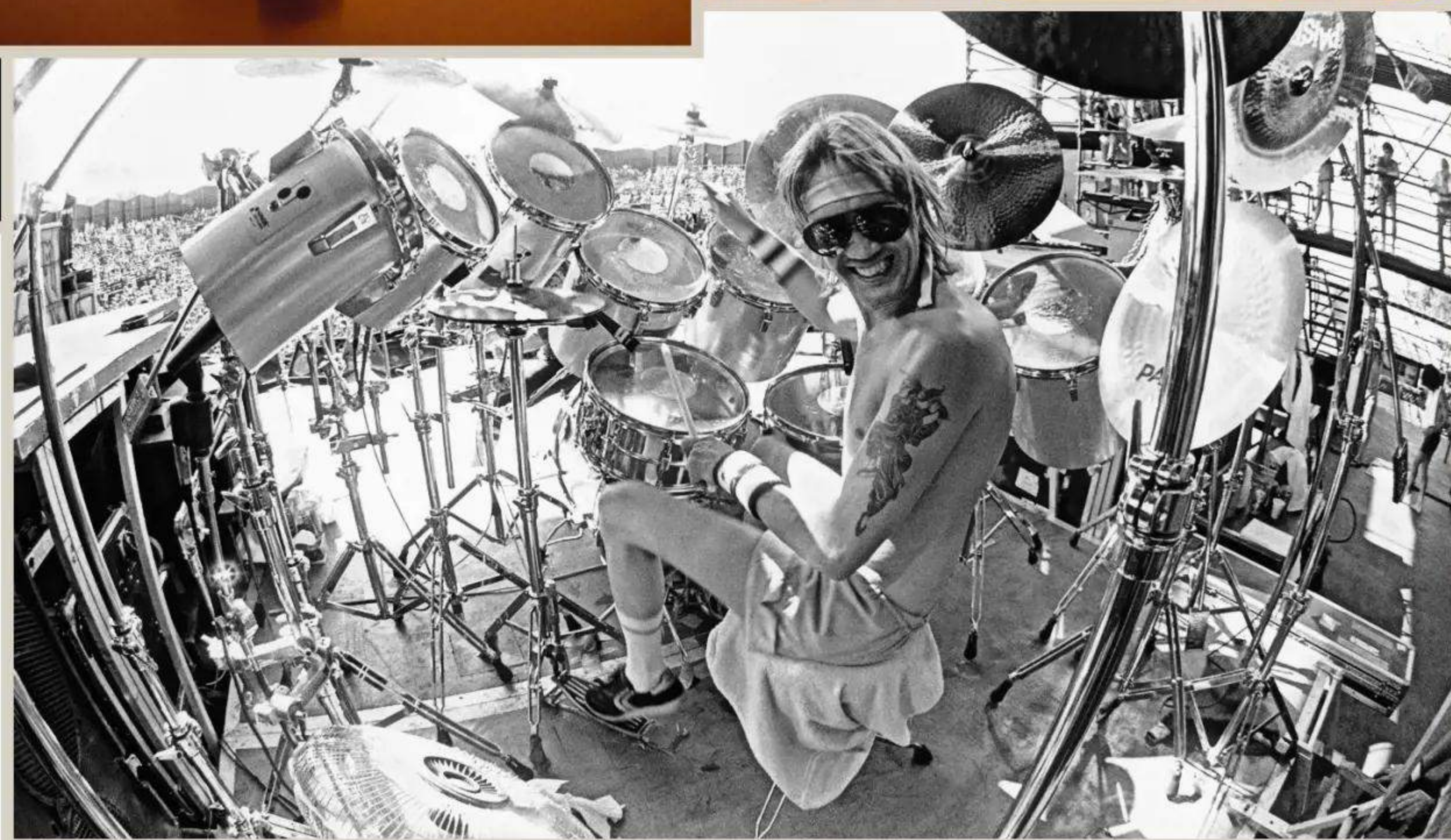


"Powerslave felt like the natural rounding off of *Piece Of Mind* and *Number Of The Beast*, that whole era."

Bruce Dickinson



Troopers on parade: (clockwise) Adrian Smith, Dave Murray, Bruce Dickinson, Nicko McBrain.



Midnight, Aces High, Powerslave and Rime Of The Ancient Mainer. Of the other four tracks, only Harris's suitably swashbuckling *The Duellists*, inspired by the 1977 Ridley Scott film of the same name, really cut muster, such was the elevated standard the band had now set themselves. Bill Hobbs, who had choreographed the film's fight scenes, coincidentally founded the fencing club of which Dickinson – an Olympic-level fencer – was a member. Dickinson's own *Flash Of The Blade* just about qualified, too, but surely one song about sword fighting per album was enough? No Maiden fan's life was going to be any the poorer, either, for having skipped Dickinson and Smith's blustering *Back In The Village* – revisiting the theme of *The Prisoner* from the *Number Of The Beast* album, only far less interestingly. Dickinson finished the lyrics for *2 Minutes To Midnight* only once they had begun recording in earnest in the studio. Everyone could hear straight away that this was another Maiden classic in the mould of early riff monsters like *Sanctuary* and *Wrathchild*.

Dickinson's personal best, however, was to be found in the mesmerising seven-minute title track, on which his use of Middle Eastern melodies, albeit rendered on a screaming electric guitar, and Egyptian mythology – both Horus, the falcon god, and his father Osiris, ruler of the underworld, are name-checked in the very first verse – created a brilliantly apt metaphor for the occult power of the rock gods, themselves 'slaves to the power of death'.

As Dickinson later explained: "Powerslave is more than just about the ancient Egyptians. It was also about us, the band, and what was happening to us. I'd been on a non-stop roller-coaster since joining the band two years before.

The tours were getting longer and crazier, and the expectations around us were astronomical by the time we came to *Powerslave*. We were slaves to the power, whether musically or in terms of just chasing success. In fact, we were both.

"There was an ironic message, too, in the lyrics. When you had amplifiers powering a big PA system, you had ones just generating power and nothing else, and they were called slave

have complete mastery of the moment. In fact, Smith told me he was so horribly hungover when he recorded his part, "it nearly killed me". He recalled how the night before, he and the band "were having a bit of a late night in the studio". "We were partying and doing guitar overdubs at the same time. Which turned more into just partying, to be honest. I went to bed fairly drunk at about three a.m., not expecting to work the next morning."

Producer Martin Birch usually never called anyone into the studio before noon. This time he phoned the still delirious Smith at 10am. "He said come down and do some more work. My head was pounding, but I went down to the studio. It turned out the

reason Martin was ready to go was because he hadn't been to bed at all yet."

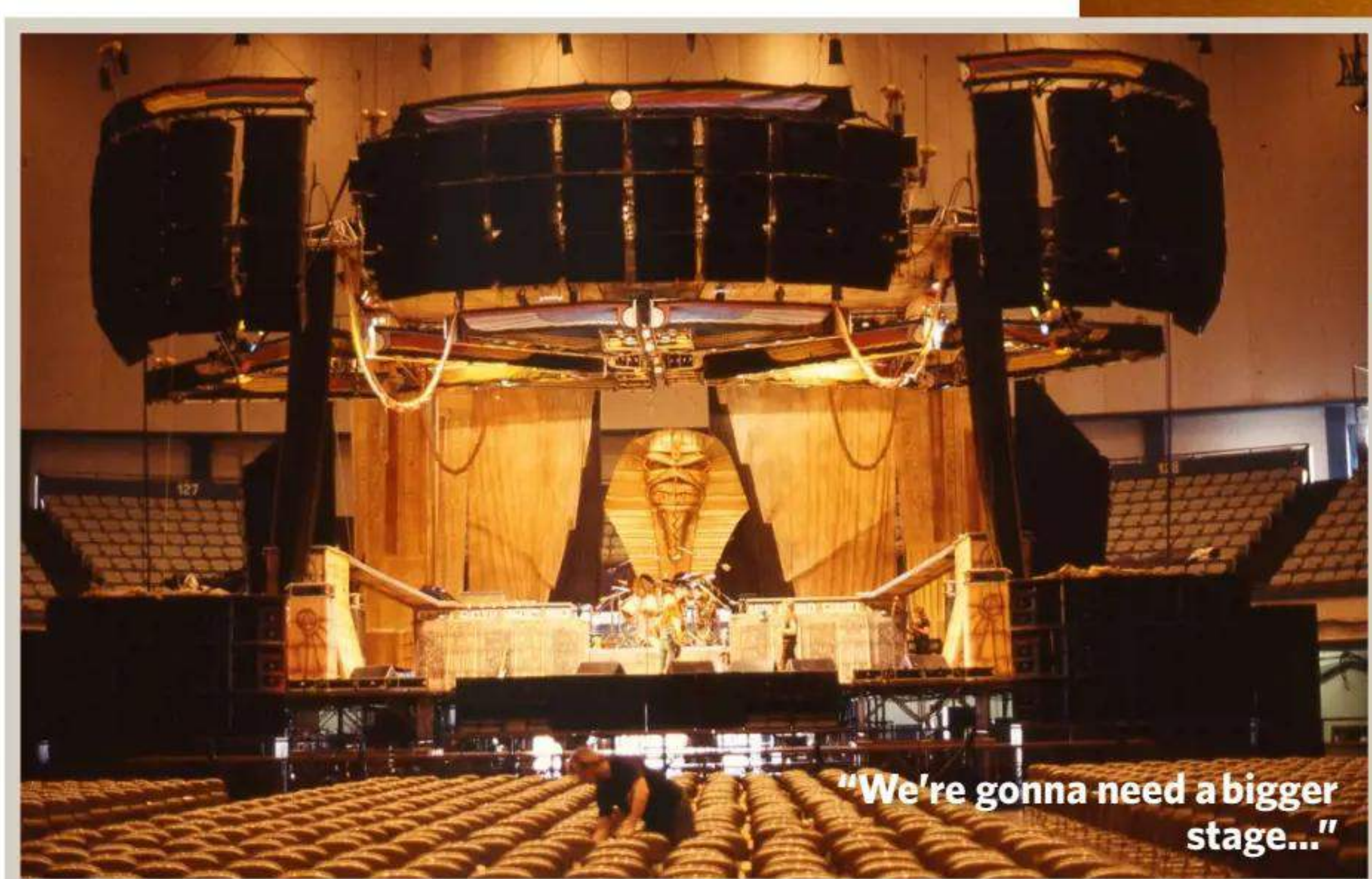
Birch had stayed up the rest of the night with singer Robert Palmer, who was about to make his fourth album at Compass Point. At the time, Palmer virtually lived on the island. No slouch himself when it came to "the playboy lifestyle", as Birch laughingly recalled, when Palmer heard his mate Martin was back in

"I played Bruce the music. He started singing, and we had *2 Minutes To Midnight*. We wrote it in about twenty minutes."

Adrian Smith

amplifiers, because they were just slaves to the big amplifier. They were, literally, power slaves."

The track also included an unexpectedly moving guitar interlude where Dave Murray and Adrian Smith entwine their solos, going from silk desert evening breezes at the start, to full-thrust adventures among the pharaohs and pyramids as the guitars lead the band into pure metal mayhem. It sounds like both guitarists



"We're gonna need a bigger stage..."

the studio with Maiden he'd come to say hi to some fellow Brits.

Smith: "So the two of them are sat behind the desk as I walk in. They said: 'Come on, then, what do you want to do?' And I said *Powerslave*."

A great singer, Palmer was also a formidable producer in his own right.

"Seeing him sitting there with Martin, waiting for me to play, I was pretty nervous, I have to admit. But I just went for the solo. It came off alright, and Robert Palmer really liked it too."

The twice-as-nice paradise they found themselves in in Nassau certainly lent itself to all sorts of shenanigans during the band's almost four-month stay.

Nicko McBrain told me that when he'd joined the band the year before, "everybody with the exception of Steve and Bruce was just fucking nuts! We were just going absolutely fucking crazy on everything we could possibly get our hands on! Nine times out of ten it was in the booze department, but, you know, we'd have a bit of 'taboo' and a bit of 'yahoo' and a little bit of livening up here and there."

ultra-highs he sought lay within the very fabric of Maiden's music. His music. Something he took very seriously, no fucking around.

Which is how he was able to turn his cathedral-like version of Coleridge's *Rime Of The Ancient Mariner* into such a monumental musical achievement. Even Smith, who admitted he was somewhat out of his comfort zone as a musician with such a demanding piece of work, recalled: "When Steve put *Mariner* forward I just knew we had to do it, because I'd never heard anyone do anything like it before. I remember how when we recorded it in the Bahamas, Steve had to hang the lyrics from the top of the wall all the way to the floor, there were so many for Bruce to learn. Steve was so fired up about it he convinced everyone else. It's so dramatic, how can you not like it?"

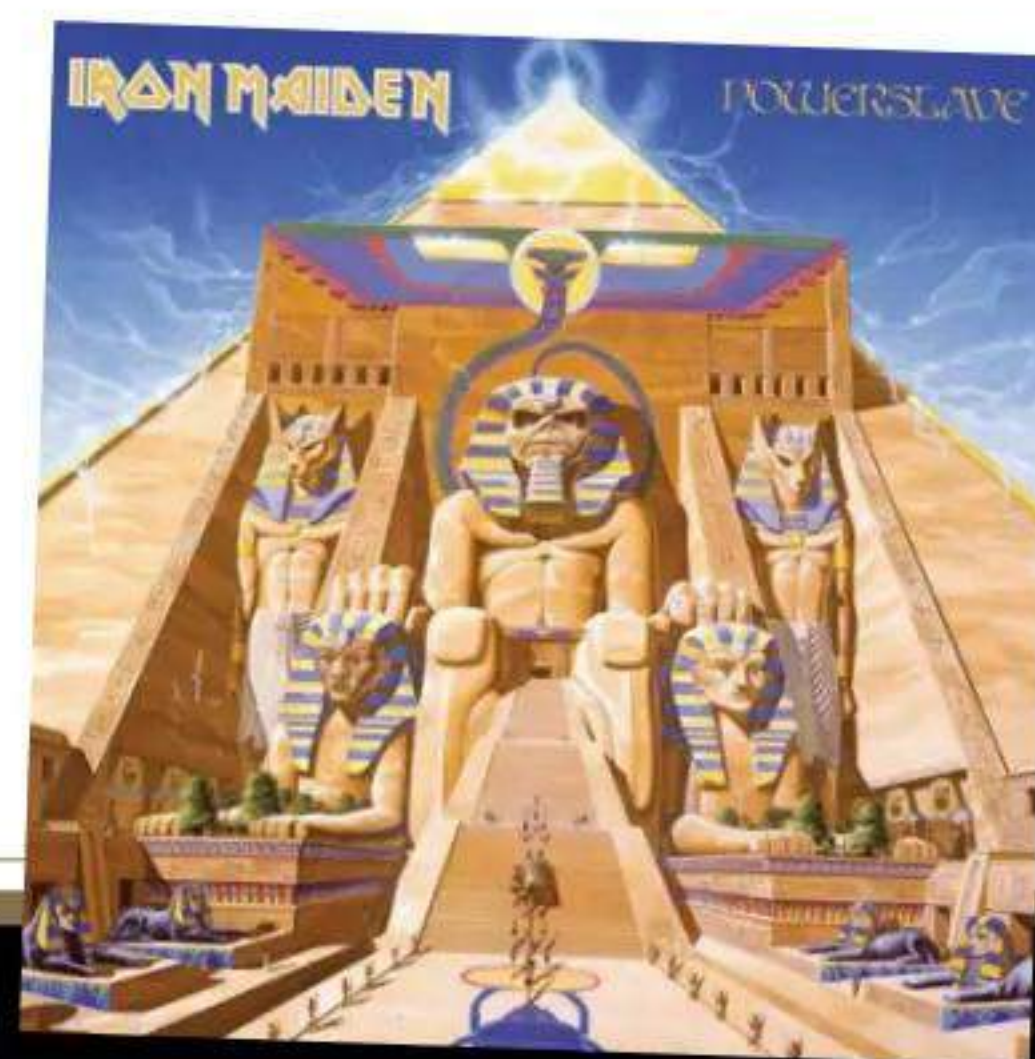
For generations of Iron Maiden fans, *Rime Of The Ancient Mariner* remains the most fully realised of all Harris's

cinematically epic rock masterpieces. There would be others – the eight-minute-plus *Alexander The Great* on their next album, *Somewhere In Time*, the almost 10-minute-long title track to their 1988 album *Seventh Son Of A Seventh Son*; and there had been others before, such as *Phantom Of The Opera*, *To Tame A Land* – but none that captured so eerily or so definitively the strange, other-worldly place Harris summoned forth in his version of *Rime Of The Ancient Mariner*.

A masterful evocation of a complicated mood-piece that would become the dramatic cornerstone of the Maiden live spectacle for many years to come, it was also prophetic in terms of Maiden's musical evolution, and that of heavy metal itself, with the coming wave of thrash- and speed-metal bands (led by Metallica,

led by Lars Ulrich, who confessed in his youth to being "the biggest Maiden fan on the planet") all drawing inspiration from its outlandish disregard for musical norms.

Indeed, *Rime* was so layered, so multi-sectioned and



"People kept talking about pressure, and looking back I can see why. But the truth is I didn't feel any at the time."

Steve Harris

On cloud nine: the *Powerslave* tour was "probably the best stage show we ever did", says Steve Harris.





"Do you think we should open it? I mean, remember *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*..."

MOSHE BRANHA/PHANTOM

almost scientifically constructed, it became the blueprint for what just a few years later became known as progressive metal. Dream Theater, arch proponents of prog-metal, once described their early musical explorations as a fusion of *Powerslave* and Rush's *Hemispheres*.

"It's great that people love the more straightforward rock stuff, cos so do I," said Harris. "But I know a lot of our fans checked out Coleridge just on the strength of our version of *Rime*. For me, knowing lots of kids in their teens discovered Coleridge's work through our music is amazing. It was the same with *To Tame A Land* on *Piece*... So many people told me that after hearing it they went and read *Dune* by Frank Herbert, which inspired it."

Equally impressive was the ancient-Egyptian motif that the album sleeve and stage show would be based on. Dickinson's title song of power-lust among the pyramids had inspired Maiden's long-time sleeve designer Derek Riggs to create his most sophisticated artwork yet: Eddie's ghastly immortal visage replacing that of the ancient pharaohs, as he sits, Sphinx-like, on his enormous desert throne, a monument to megalomania, as self-absorbed as the Sun. On stage it was simply a question of bringing the album sleeve into three-dimensional life, topped off with a 30-foot mummified Eddie, eyes shooting fire. "Cos you think of Egypt and the pyramids, and really, how do you portray that without looking like Hawkwind?" said Harris. "But it was probably the best stage show we ever did."

Dave Murray later told me that he remembered the *Powerslave* album as "the moment when we first realised we'd have to start taking things a bit more seriously". "That was that start," he said, "of us being aware we weren't just young tearaways any more."

In 1984, with *Powerslave*, the band had begun their metamorphosis into seasoned pros. In this respect also, Maiden's fifth album would be a watershed in their career; the moment when, ready or not, the boys in the band were forced to step up and become men.

"Knowing lots of kids discovered Coleridge's work through our music is amazing."

— Steve Harris —

"It felt sort of like we had got to the top of the mountain with that one," said Harris. "We had never really felt that way before. Everything up to then had been about climbing the mountain. With *Powerslave* it felt like we were looking out over the rest of the world."

Released in September 1984, *Powerslave* was Iron Maiden's second British No.1 album, and their second million-selling album in the US, where it reached No.12. It also heralded the start of World Slavery, the biggest, most successful tour they would ever undertake.

"It was the best tour we ever did and it was

the worst," said Dickinson. "And it nearly finished us off for good."

Ultimately, *Powerslave* was a gloriously packaged, if somewhat patchy, collection of material: four absolute epics; four average joes.

"I think this album is superior to the previous one," Dickinson told me. "We took what was best in *Piece Of Mind*, while stressing the aggressive style of *Number Of The Beast*."

Harris felt the opposite. Looking back, he told me: "I still think of *Powerslave* as a really, really strong album. I think there are four stand-out tracks on there, all of which we did live,

and that's *Rime Of The Ancient Mariner*, *2 Minutes To Midnight*, *Powerslave* itself and *Aces High*. Of the other tracks... there is some good ones. There's *The Duellists*, which I still think is good, you know, its musically interesting. But if you put *The Duellists* against *Rime Of The Ancient Mariner* and *2 Minutes To Midnight*... I mean, it's just no way. But they weren't filler songs or anything

like that, I just think those four particular songs were really strong."

Piece Of Mind would remain Harris's favourite Iron Maiden album for some years, until they made *Seventh Son Of A Seven Son* in 1988.

Years later, Dickinson said: "*Powerslave* felt like the sort of natural rounding off of *Piece Of Mind* and *Number Of The Beast*, that whole sort of era. I remember listening back to it and I thought: 'Um ... this is great, but I don't know how much more we can do of records that sound in this kind of vein.'"

Um... Time would tell... 🗨



The Soundtrack Of My Life

KK's Priest guitarist **KK Downing** on the records, artists and gigs that are of lasting significance to him

Interview: **Dave Ling**



KK DOWNING: ADAM GASSON; JIMI HENDRIX: GETTY

Born in West Bromwich in 1951, KK Downing was a member of Judas Priest from 1969 to 2011, and his guitar partnership with Glenn Tipton was a defining element of the band's ever-anthem brand of heavy metal. Last year Downing was inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame with the group. Currently he leads his own band, KK's Priest.

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

You Really Got Me by The Kinks, back in 1964. I remember thinking: "Why do I like this? Aren't The Kinks supposed to be a pop band?" Later on I realised that I loved *You Really Got Me* because it was a riff song. That riff got you up and out of your chair, didn't it?

THE FIRST SONG I PERFORMED LIVE

Before Priest, I joined a pop band. We did weddings and stuff. My debut gig would have been in a Working Men's Club. It may not have been the first song of the night, but I remember we did *Tie A Yellow Ribbon Round The Ole Oak Tree* [a 1973 hit for Tony Orlando & Dawn]. I wish I still had the set-list. I'd probably choke.

THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

It's got to be *Electric Ladyland*. I was already a Hendrix fan when it came out [in 1968], and I just loved it. *Electric Ladyland* was pretty eclectic, and it gripped me. I used to shut the curtains, put on the headphones, drop the needle and not move a muscle till the final note.

THE GUITAR HERO

Without a doubt it's Hendrix again. He was the all-in-one package. Jimi was a brilliant musician, he wrote incredible songs, and he sang as well. Nobody before or since was as charismatic.

THE SINGER

The guy that really, really impressed me early on was Ian Gillan. *Deep Purple In Rock*, and particularly the song *Child In Time* when Gillan hit those high notes. That's why when I found Rob Halford, who could do the same thing and lived not too far away, it was a dream come true.

THE SONGWRITER

Again, and I'm sorry about this, I'll say Jimi Hendrix. Hearing Jimi Hendrix was my first good healthy dose of heavy metal. Those riffs – *Foxy Lady* and *Purple Haze* – were something completely new.

THE CULT HERO

Leslie West. His albums with Mountain were so important for an army of guitar players. He had such a brilliant guitar tone. *Theme For An Imaginary Western*, which was written by Jack Bruce and Pete

Brown [on 1970's *Climbing!*] had a wonderful solo that consisted of maybe four or five notes.

THE BEST RECORD I MADE

[Laughing] No apologies, I must pick my albums by KK's Priest: *Sermons Of The Sinner* [2021] and the new one, *Sinner Rides Again*. They're both very, very kick-ass and I'm proud of them both. They epitomise everything about me and who I am. They continue my legacy [with Judas Priest] and carry the hallmarks of the past.

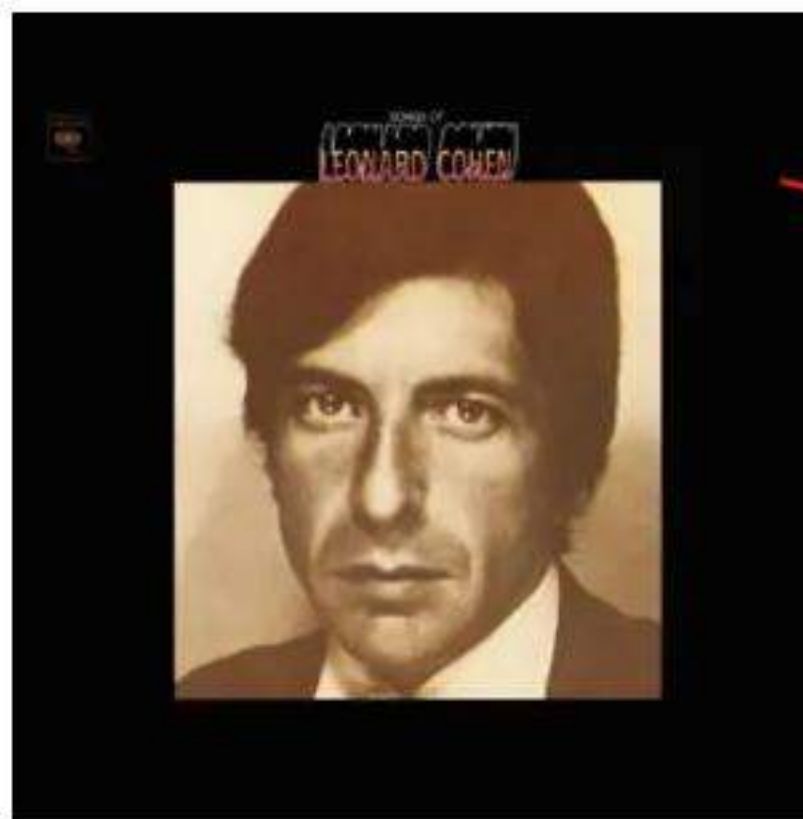
THE WORST RECORD I MADE

Jesus, I'll have to go with [Judas Priest's 1981 album] *Point Of Entry*. But then again there are some great songs on that one. That's so, so hard to answer.



THE BEST LIVE BAND I'VE SEEN

Once again, Jimi Hendrix. The most memorable of all the times I saw him was at the Coventry Theatre in 1967. That concert will stay with me till the day I die.



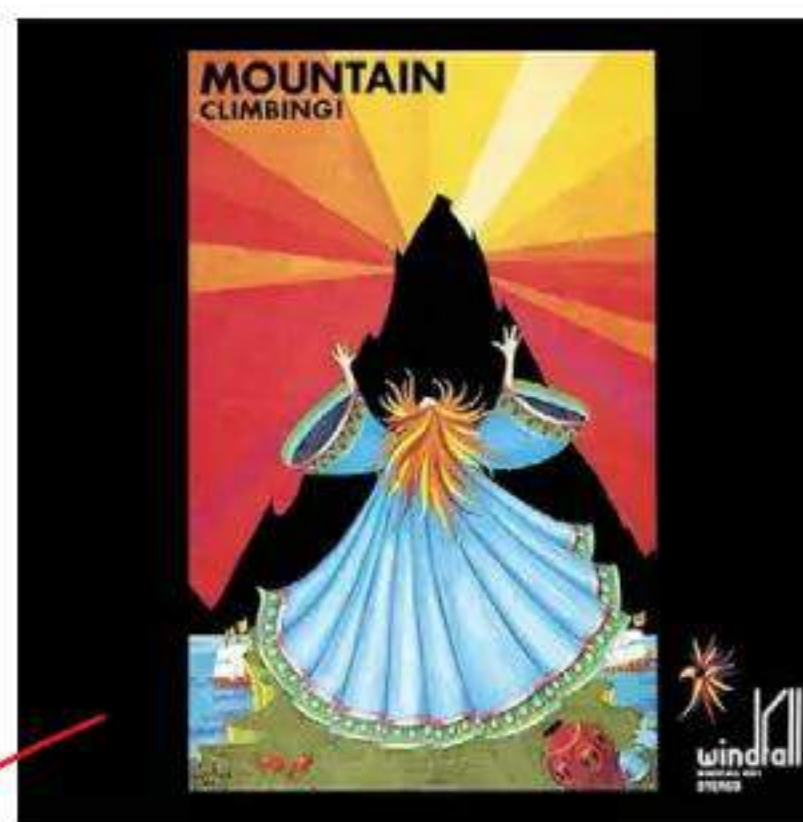
MY GUILTY PLEASURE

This might shock you, but I really love Leonard Cohen's first album [*Songs Of Leonard Cohen*]. I was dating a girl who owned it, and I was surprised to realise that it had some stuff for me. His right-hand picking technique was wonderful.



THE MOST UNDERRATED BAND EVER

They've been together for fifty years, but I'll pick Wishbone Ash. They were rated at the time, though maybe not so much any more, I guess. I only grew to like them in the last years ten years or so, but nobody could deny that they were so influential.



THE BEST LIVE ALBUM

I'd like to say [Judas Priest's] *Unleashed In The East*, but another that jumps out at me is *Tokyo Tapes* by the Scorpions. I liked that one a lot when it came out [in 1978]. It had Uli Jon Roth doing his Hendrix-y

thing, and some amazing songs.

MY SATURDAY NIGHT/PARTY SONG

Anything by AC/DC. They always get me pumped up and ready to rock. Nobody does it better.

THE ANTHEM

It's got to be Twisted Sister. I saw them a few years ago, and when they played *We're Not Gonna Take It* the crowd just went ballistic.

MY 'IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE' SONG

I'll go back to that Leonard Cohen album I just mentioned, for *Suzanne*. It worked then, so why shouldn't it work now?

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

I'd be happy with *Purple Haze*, the song that made me pledge my soul to what became heavy metal. 🤘

The Sinner Rides Again is out now via Napalm.

"Jimi was the all-in-one package. Nobody before or since was as charismatic."



THE
★CLASSIC★
Rock
INTERVIEW

SHERYL CROW

Artist. Activist. Grammy winner. Superstar. Cancer survivor... As she airs her most socially charged songs yet on twelfth album *Evolution*, she looks back on the battles, triumphs, hardships, hopes and achievements that mark out her winding road.

Interview: **Henry Yates**

It's difficult to believe we've had the pleasure of Sheryl Crow's company for three decades now – not least to the singer-songwriter herself. "I'll be honest with you, I don't know if anybody ever really feels their age," she considers. "I mean, I'm sixty-two and I need to get my lips done, I need to get a little facelift. But unless I'm looking in a mirror, mentally I feel like I'm about thirty-six."

Talking in the music room of her home in rural Nashville, sitting in front of a rack of vintage acoustic guitars befitting the queen of heartland roots rock, Crow is everything we need right now from our rock stars. Witty, articulate, informed and inquisitive, she is nobody's vacuous pin-up. She has opinions: on gun control, climate change, military conflict, the Presidential election, the insidious rise of AI and what it might mean for her two teenage sons. Ask her and she'll talk about all of it (the only subjects we're told are off the table today are her shift in the 80s singing backing vocals for Michael Jackson's *Bad* tour, and her much raked-over split from disgraced cyclist Lance Armstrong). That readiness to stand up and be counted came from her formative years, she says, still talking with a Midwest drawl.

Sheryl Crow was born on February 11, 1962 in Kennett, the largest city of the so-called Missouri Bootheel. A classic overachieving middle child, her prolific contribution to life at Kennett High School saw her compete as an all-state track athlete and join the National Honor Society. But it was the combination of her parents' politics and her musical talents that set her path.

|||||||
**"One of the very
first things [jingles]
I did was for
McDonald's. I had
to impersonate
a singing cow."**

**Your biog makes you sound
like the dream teenager –
sporty, clever, popular...**

Oh, I was perfect [laughs]. No, I was a people pleaser. I think I wanted my parents to really like me. It was all about making good grades, being in student council and the Honor Society. I felt like love was attached to being good, being smart, being liked. Years of therapy had to un-ingrain [the idea] that love is not attached to

anything. That everybody deserves to be loved, whether or not you get Fs in school and smoke weed. That love is not something you earn. And I don't fault my parents for that. I took on that persona and I ran with it until I was famous. At a certain point, you realise: "Wait a minute, I can stand up here in front of a hundred and eighty thousand people at a festival and walk away not feeling loved. What's wrong with me? Do I not feel ➤



Crow and Michael Jackson during his 1987-89 Bad Tour, on which she was a backing vocalist.



At the 1997 Grammys, where she picked up the Best Female Rock Vocal Performance award for *If It Makes You Happy*.



Class acts: Crow and Stevie Nicks at the 2010 Grammys in L.A.

“After I came off the Michael Jackson tour, I played for everybody. Everybody was hoping I was going to be Madonna or Paula Abdul.”

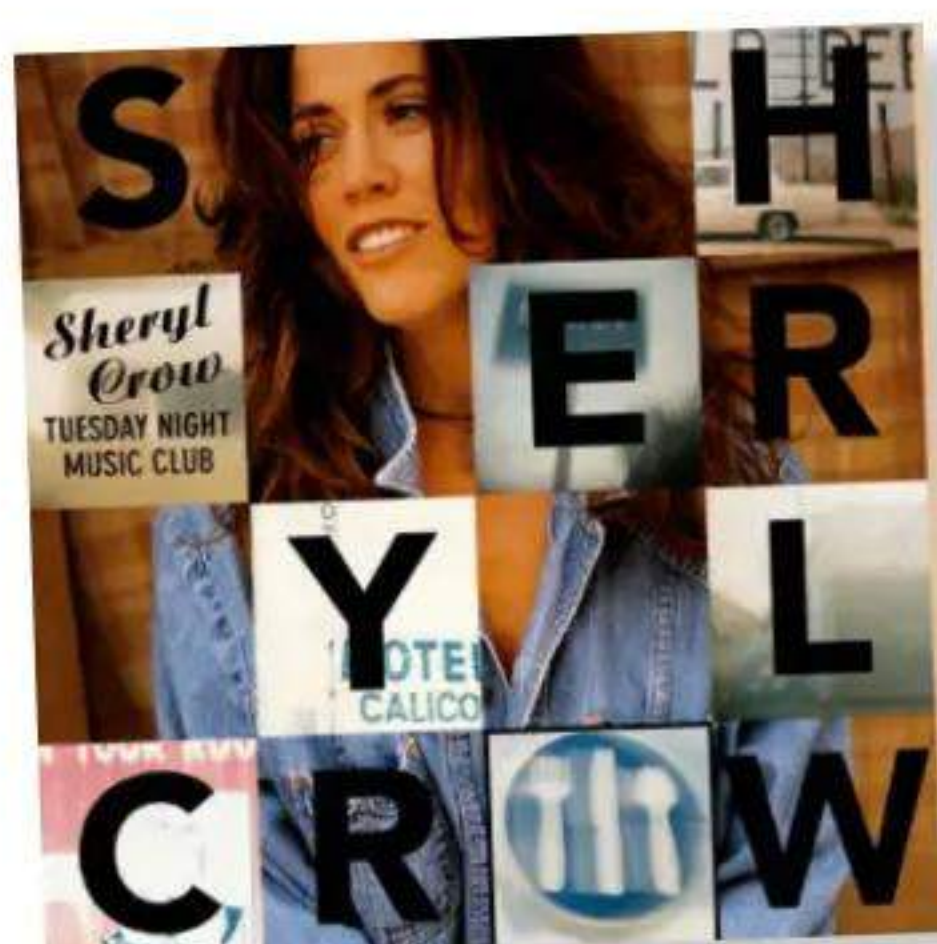
like I’m deserving?” So I was a good kid. But then when I hit my thirties I let it all hang out. I’d been a pretty good girl up until then – then the partying started.

Looking back now, how would you describe your parents?

They were musical and they played together in a swing band on the weekends. I think my dad really would have liked to have been a professional musician, but he got his degree in law and he was a very Atticus Finch [figure], very much about the judicial system. My mom was always an activist. When I was growing up in the late sixties there was a lot of racial and social unrest, and she’d be active in church and taking care of older people. I think you model to your kids how you see the world, and that was so much in my DNA. My dad was a conservative and my mom was a liberal, so I grew up with them having strong debates about politics. That also informed me about the way the world should look.

As a kid, when did it become obvious that music would be your road?

I have vivid memories of my mom and dad having friends over. They’d be drinking and they’d be like: “Come here and play that James Taylor song for everybody!” And I’d be like: “Ah, I don’t wanna do that!” I can actually remember playing *My Love* by Paul McCartney – and my dad being so angry. That was my first bit of censorship. He’s like: “Do you know what that song means, young lady?” And I was like: “No, I don’t know what it means, dad – I’m twelve.” I remember being the sort of party trick as a kid. Y’know, bring her out and have her play something on piano.



When did the wider world realise that you had a talent?

When I got to the University Of Missouri and started playing keyboard in bands, I started getting noticed more. But I did not ever want to be a frontperson. I remember my college professor saying that I was never going to be a great classical pianist, because I could play pieces by ear. He said: “You will be a great pop player, but you will never make it in the classical world.” And I knew that. I knew the dedication it took to be a concert pianist was definitely squashed by the fact I could play the piece relatively okay after hearing it a few times.

Even after graduating college, there was no indication of the heights to come, with Crow working as a music teacher, gigging on the weekends and recording a string of sometimes banal but often lucrative advertising jingles. By 1987, it seemed her best hope might be fame by association, with Michael Jackson’s *Bad* tour seeing her duet with him on *I Just Can’t Stop Loving You*.

But, as she remembers today, Crow craved a career on her own terms. She moved to Los Angeles in her late twenties to shop her material around, before falling in with the West Coast songwriting collective who performed on (and inspired the name of) her 1993 solo debut *Tuesday Night Music Club*.

You worked on some advertising jingles. Which was the strangest one you did?

One of the very first things [jingles] I did was for McDonald’s, and I had to impersonate a singing cow. I had to do several different

voices, singing ‘Ee-i-ee-i-o’. It was for a campaign where you’d get a toy farm animal with the Happy Meal.

Why do you think you weren’t satisfied just being a jobbing musician?

I don’t know if I was dissatisfied. I think I just always had a burning desire to be [more]. And I’m sure it has to do with my upbringing. I grew up listening to artists who for me were important. I remember listening to great songwriters and rock stars, from Fleetwood Mac to Stevie Wonder, James Taylor, Carole King, Elton John, Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell. That’s what I wanted to be. I wanted to write important things, and I wanted to be important. I didn’t want to just be good – I wanted to write music that mattered. Everything else was just something that led up to that.

How did you feel as a newcomer in Los Angeles when you moved there?

The first thing I did was pick up a *Thomas Guide* map and get a book of all the studios in the greater Los Angeles area. Then I took my demo tape to every single one and said will you please ask whoever to listen to this. I was very naïve. The city looked giant to me. I’d only been there once before. Suddenly I’m there, driving my



Posing for a portrait for the New Faces section of *Rolling Stone* magazine, August 1993.

“I wanted to be great. I wanted to write great music, I wanted to be the best musician I could be, I wanted to be important.”

own car, I don’t know where anything is, I don’t know anybody. It felt huge and glamorous and full of rich people. I’d never seen Rolls-Royces and Mercedes before. I’d see these huge homes everywhere, then I went and crawled into my tiny studio apartment. Once you’re there for a while, the chasm between the wealthy and very-not-wealthy becomes not only overwhelming but really depressing. But I mean, I just figured it out.

Every artist has horror stories of being rejected by record labels. Did that happen to you, and what reasons did they give?

Oh, after I came off the Michael Jackson tour I played for everybody. I think, because of the notoriety of that tour, everybody was hoping I was going to be Madonna or Paula Abdul. And I didn’t want to be those. I wanted to be more like Stevie Nicks or Linda Ronstadt, and that wasn’t

what was ‘it’. So I got a lot of development deal offers, but everybody turned me down.

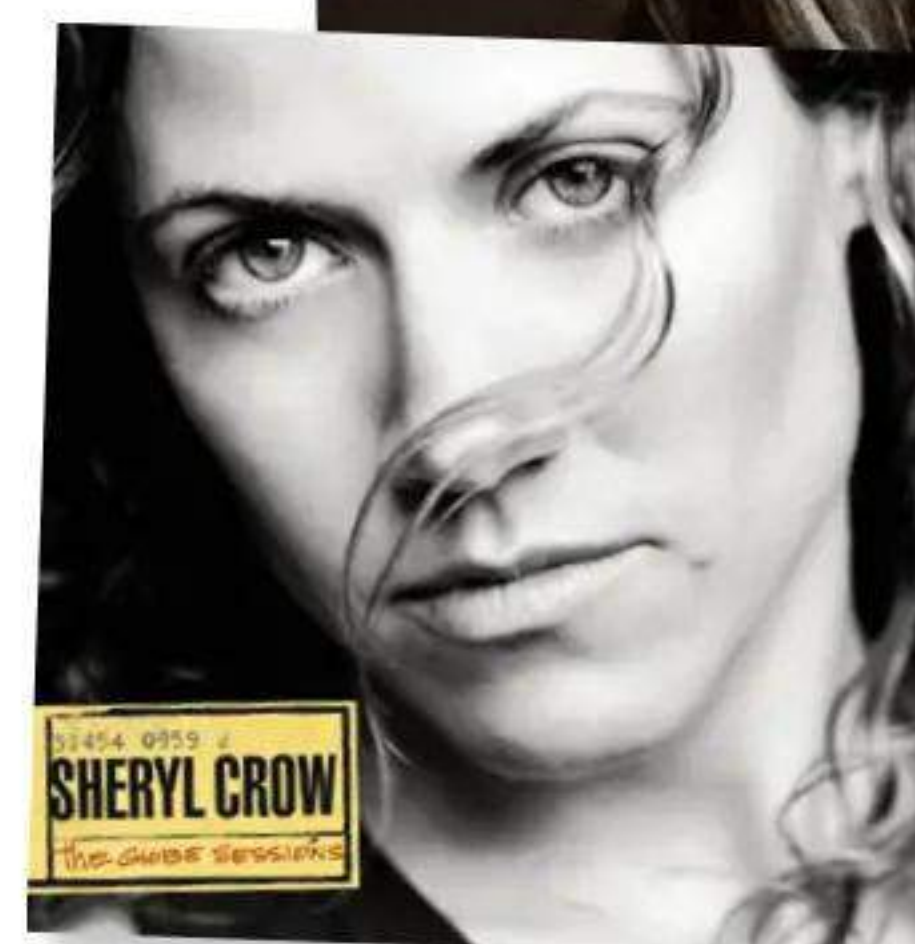
Finally you got signed to A&M Records. But in 1992 your debut album was shelved. How devastating was that for a young artist?

Well it wasn’t devastating, because I didn’t want them to put it out. I was the one who went to them and said: “I feel like this isn’t the right record. I have one shot, and if this comes out, then I’ll be done.” To A&M’s credit, they did not put it out – they ate the four hundred thousand dollars. But I sat around for quite a long time, and started hearing that I was about to be dropped. And at that time I fell in with

Bill Bottrell, and started making the *Tuesday Night Music Club* record. By the time I made that first record I was twenty-eight. Y’know, I can remember the Rolling Stones saying to me: “If you’re thirty-five in rock’n’roll, you’re not in rock’n’roll any more”.

Do you remember the first time you performed live under your own name?

It was at this club just south of LA. I was opening for John Hiatt, who was pretty big at the time. Even though I had a band, and I’d been playing some gigs, this was the first full-length gig. I invited the guys from the Tuesday Night Music Club to come sit in. And we were terrible – and John Hiatt was so mad. It was like a party. ➤





Crow in Concord, California on the Jeep World Outside festival, August 2002.

Everybody was drinking and talking on stage, when I was supposed to be opening up for this other artist. After that I was like: “Okay, I gotta get my shit together.”

We think of Tuesday Night Music Club now as a smash hit, but it wasn’t an immediate success. It took the *All I Wanna Do* single to light the fuse.

It was fantastic when that record exploded, but it was very arduous up to that point. Because we had been touring in a van, and we had travelled everywhere. The first two places that ever played the record were Colorado and France, so it seemed like we were either in Colorado or France at all times. Then when we had a full-fledged hit on our hands we had to go out and tour it again. So we had two years on that record. And by the end of touring a record for two years, you really want to shoot yourself in the foot and say: “I’m done.” So when I went in to make the second record [1996’s *Sheryl Crow*], I was very over the first one.

At the time, I was like: “If I never play these songs again, I’ll be happy.” Nevertheless, the gift of that first record was [incredible]. I’m playing that music still, and very grateful for it. I think

about a song like *All I Wanna Do* – which for years I just dreaded playing – and in hindsight there was a moment where I could look at that song as being attached to the infinite opportunities it brought me. When that thing took off, we toured in Japan, Singapore, Russia, Israel – and they knew every word, even if they didn’t speak English. And what can do that? A song can.

From the mid-90s into the early millennium, Crow was a stone-cold superstar, releasing a stream of multi-platinum records including *Sheryl Crow* (1996), *The Globe Sessions* (1998) and *C’mon, C’mon* (2002). A lesser artist might have kept their head down and enjoyed the success, but Crow was already airing her political views – and suffering the fallout, while struggling with an unregulated tabloid press.

That second album caused controversy because of a line from *Love Is A Good Thing*: ‘Watch our children while they kill each other,

with a gun they bought at Walmart discount stores.’ Do you think artists have a duty to speak up politically?

I don’t think they have a duty. I do miss that you can’t do it any more because you have to be concerned about your following. Certainly, when I was coming up in the business, I didn’t have a physical documentation of losing fans, or hearing how much they hated me. And there was a gift in that, certainly. But I grew up listening to great writers who wrote songs that got played on the radio that were about *stuff*. From Buffalo Springfield to Marvin Gaye, I mean, these were big hits and they were anti-war, they were about race relationships. I miss that. Almost any song I hear on the radio now is about sex, at least in the pop world. And then in country you hear this false narrative about America. I’m just like: “Where are the truth-tellers?” Well, they’re probably not gonna get played on the radio, and I don’t know if they’re gonna ‘trend’ anywhere. I don’t know how any of that works any more. But to me, writing is my safe place, it’s my therapy, it’s my love, it’s my release.

Your performance at the ill-fated Woodstock 1999 festival was soured by sexist cat-calls from the crowd. What do you remember about that day?

I have jarring memories of it. It’s funny, you can have an amazing gig and remember very little about it. And when I say it was a shit gig, they were literally throwing faecal matter from the porta-potties they’d turned over. And it was a very sexist atmosphere. It was a debacle. Watching the documentary [*Trainwreck: Woodstock ’99*], you realise: “Okay, all things that are money-driven are going to wind up being a shit-show.”

Everything is about intention. If you start out with the intention being bringing people together in the spirit of Woodstock, it would have been a completely different scenario. They got what they got.



Which tracks from your first few albums would you put on a jukebox?

Oh gosh. Maybe the obscure songs. I think every artist wants to play the song that tells the tale of their parts – and those are generally not the hits. I mean, I’d say that *My Favourite Mistake*, from *The Globe Sessions*, would be on the

jukebox, because I still enjoy playing that song and hearing it when it comes on the radio. There’s also a song on that record called *Riverwide* that is very Appalachian-meets-Zeppelin. I love playing it. But people in the audience kinda look at me like: “What is she doing right now? I’m gonna grab a beer...” Yeah, I mean, there’s a song on every record where I feel like: “Okay, this is the summation of my existence” – and those are generally the songs where people go to the loo.

Every young band and artist thinks attaining massive success will make all their dreams come true. Is that how you found it?

Oh no, I didn’t find it that way. I found it to be



Sheryl Crow meeting Johnny Cash for the first time, at the the Pantages Theatre in LA in 1995.

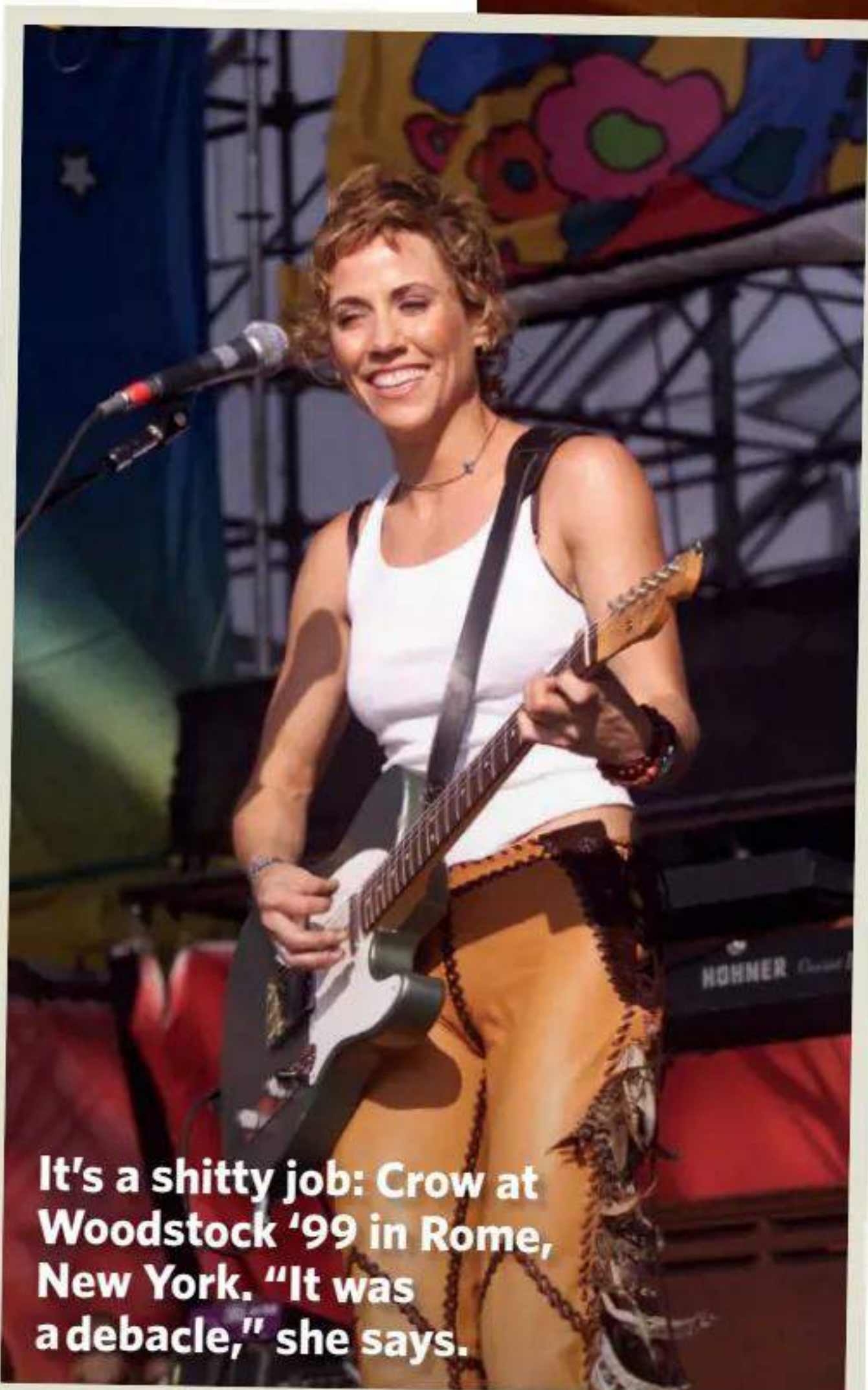
very confusing. Because one day you're struggling to get on top, then within what feels like a week you're on top, and then there's this crazy hysteria to rip you apart. I think if you're an artist – which already dictates that you're a pretty sensitive person, at least in my case – I could read a review and it might be glowing, but there might be two negative comments, and those would stick with me far more than any of the accolades.

I think kids now are more able to navigate the fame thing, because they go in to become famous, and then everything serves that purpose. But for me, like I said, I wanted to be great. I wanted to write great music, I wanted to be the best musician I could be, I wanted to be important. And at the end of the day, you realise: "Wait a minute, I need to reassess what this means to me."

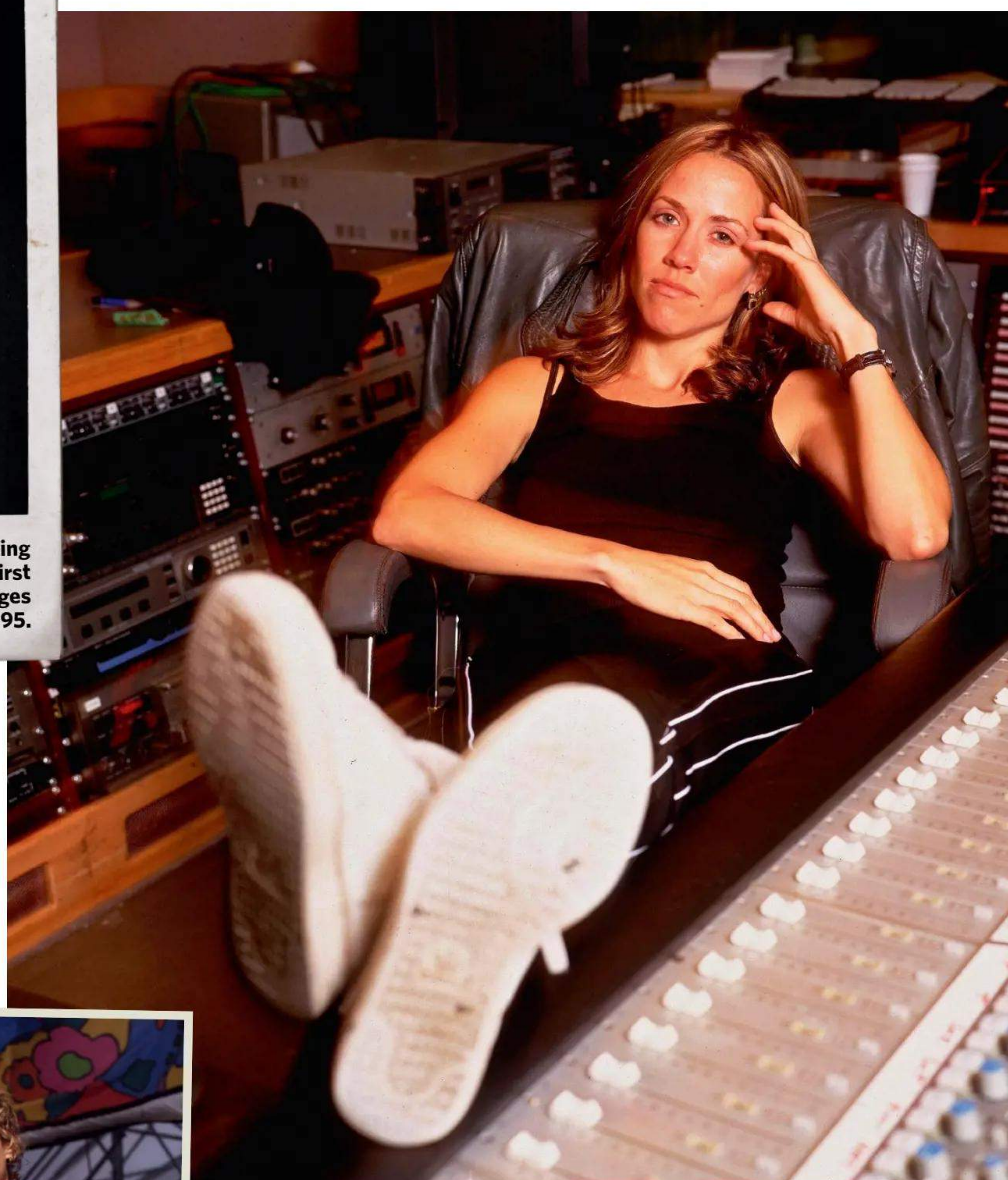
I remember Chrissie Hynde talking to me when I was making the *C'mon* record, which was killing me – I'd spent a ton of money on it and just couldn't seem to finish it. She was like: "Music is not your life, it's something that you do." And she told me about taking time off to raise her kids and then coming back. She's like: "This is something that should give you joy". It took that moment – and struggling up to that moment – for that to have meaning for me.

You've been open about struggling with depression around the turn of the millennium. How bad did things get?

It was pretty bad. For me, there were maybe three occasions where I had to get very tangible, like, stop everything and get help. I'm not ashamed to say it, and I've been lucky that I had people around me who were not afraid to ask how they could help, my manager being one of them.



It's a shitty job: Crow at Woodstock '99 in Rome, New York. "It was a debacle," she says.



"To me, writing is my safe place, it's my therapy, it's my love, it's my release."

Are you glad social media wasn't around to document those times?

Honestly, if I had to live in a fish bowl like people do now... I wouldn't be able to.

Did you experience those kind of intrusive moments that haunt the

biggest stars – fans hammering on the car windows and so on?

Yeah. I think the one that illustrates it best, though, was when my high-profile engagement [to Lance Armstrong] broke off in 2006, and six days later I was diagnosed with breast cancer. And the paparazzi were outside, shooting into the house, trying to get me looking forlornly out the window or something. I couldn't go for a jog in the neighbourhood without them running after me. At a certain point, it did make me feel like: "Who are we as humans if what sells these magazines that everybody is buying is seeing

somebody at their lowest moment?" And it wasn't long after that that I wound up moving to Nashville. I felt like I could protect myself better there and I could feel better about what life is supposed to hold.

Your collaborators from that period include Prince, Keith Richards, even Johnny Cash. What are your favourite memories?

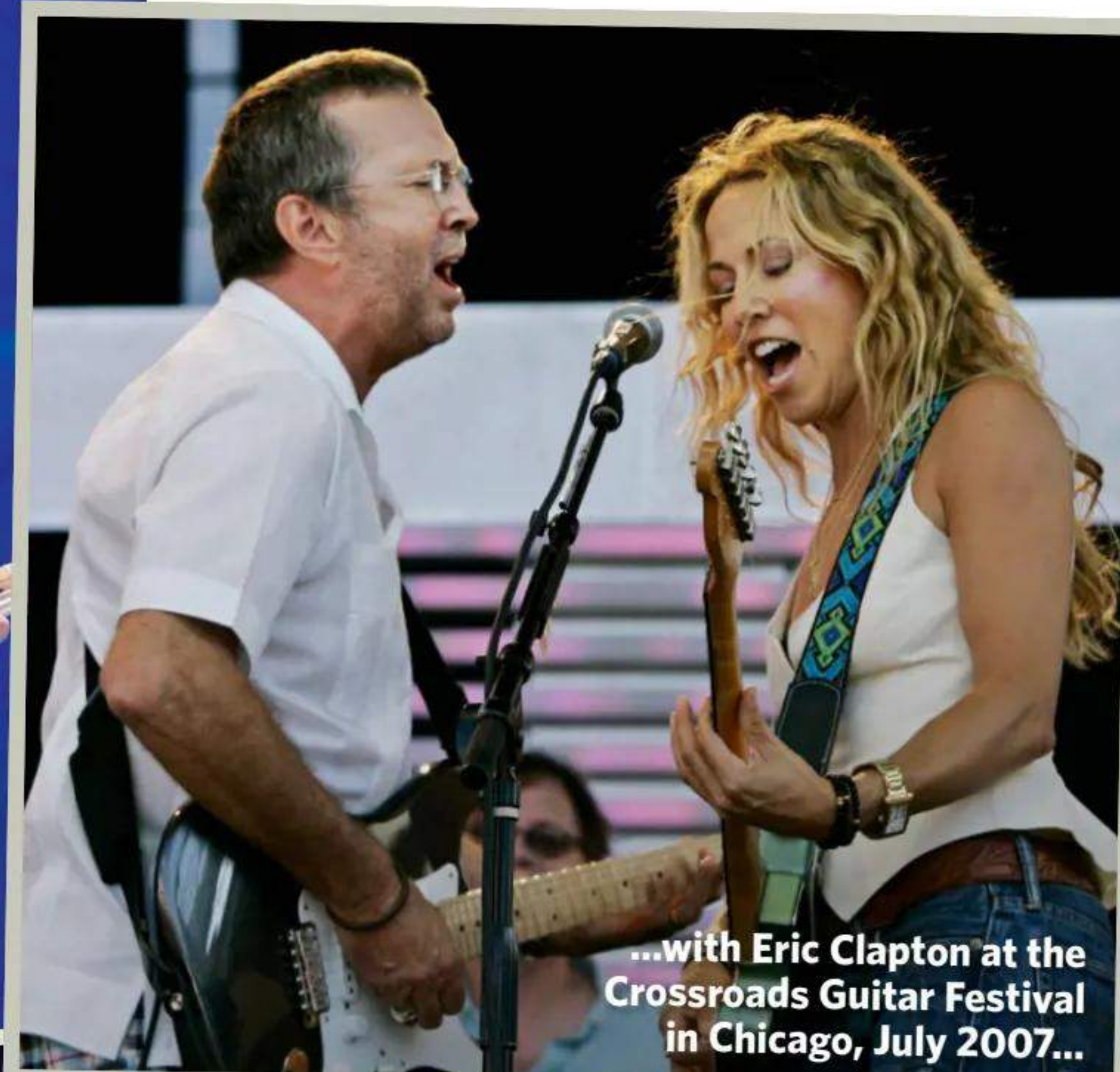
That would have been the one argument for having a cell phone – all the selfies. Prince was everything you hoped he would be. Larger-than-life. A great hang. A smart guy. Perhaps the finest musician I've been around. Y'know, the guy has a basketball court next to his studio – he's shooting in high heels. We recorded in his studio, and then he's like: "Let's go downtown."

We go to First Avenue, and we kick the band off and we play. He was that guy. He was unpredictable. And if he picked you, that was like the height of a compliment. I still listen to his music and get off on it. I'll still go out and jog to *Sign O' The Times*. The guy's a genius.





Rock and Rolling: Crow guesting with the Stones at the United Center in Chicago, May 31, 2013...



...with Eric Clapton at the Crossroads Guitar Festival in Chicago, July 2007...



...and with Chrissie Hynde at American Express Central Park In Blue Concert, NYC 1999.

“I can remember the Rolling Stones saying to me: ‘If you’re thirty-five in rock’n’roll, you’re not in rock’n’roll any more.’”

Even now, you get the sense that Sheryl Crow is still questing. As a Nashville resident and lifelong fan of artists like Gram Parsons, Emmylou Harris and the Flying Burrito Brothers, her swerve into country music with 2013’s *Feels Like Home* felt more honest than calculated. But she grew frustrated with country radio’s gatekeepers, and has seemed more comfortable since returning to her roots with 2017’s *Be Myself*, setting in motion a late-period run that includes this year’s *Evolution*. It’s a record with heavy themes that you can dance to, we suggest, and Crow doesn’t disagree.

What was the thinking behind having your country period?

I wanted to stretch myself. I also loved the idea of only playing on the weekends, because I had two little baby boys. And that’s what country artists do. But you can’t break into that world, even if your music was inspired by country artists that these young people don’t even know. So it was a great exercise, and I do feel like some of the songs on those records are really well crafted. But it’s not completely authentic to what I do. I think my reaction to that experience was making *Be Myself*—and literally writing and recording it in three weeks.

You’ve won nine Grammy awards. How much does receiving awards mean to you?

My thirteen-year-old came into the piano room the other day, and on the top shelf are my Grammys. He said: “Mom, you should have a trophy case.” And I was like: “Nah.” Let’s face it, I’ve gotten to stand on stage with Eric Clapton and sing with Johnny Cash. That could not

be moulded into a piece of bronze and have as much meaning as being there. At the end of your life, I think it’s the people and the moments, not the awards.

You said that 2019’s *Threads* would be your last album. How come you’ve just released *Evolution*?

You can’t believe anything that comes out of my mouth. Everything I’ve said in this interview has been a lie. No, I did say that, and for good reason, in that I do think making an album is, I would say, an overindulgence. But really what I mean is a complete and total waste of time and money. Because people don’t listen to a full body of work, with a beginning, middle and end. This record, though, I had seven songs I sent to Mike [Elizondo, producer], and in the course of that we wrote a couple more, and it was like: “Well, we have an album.” It just felt like a collection.

‘*Evolution*’ is a fascinating album title. But it doesn’t seem like you’re necessarily happy with the direction that human evolution has taken?

Well, I guess I’m asking the question: where are we going? I’m the mom of two teenagers, and I ask the hard questions. Like, why are we in this position? The planet, environmentally, is in grave danger. We’re in all of these wars. And people seem to hate each other in this country. And then you plop in the middle of all that, the advent of AI. Y’know, that is going to be a part of our every waking moment. And for artists it’s terrifying. So I guess it just asks the question: at

what point are we going to return to soul, spirit and truth from lies?

Why do you distrust AI so much?

It’s interesting, because years ago [theoretical physicist] Stephen Hawking predicted that it wouldn’t be the climate that would be the demise of mankind, it would be AI. Well, at the time, I was testifying before Congress about stopping global warming and working on climate change and blah-blah-blah, and I was, like: “AI? I don’t even know what that is.” And we’re here now. I started reading about it, and thinking this is dangerous territory for artists. Because if you have AI programmes that can write lyrics for you—or you pay five dollars and have John Mayer sing your demo, and you won’t be able to tell the difference—then where are we going?

Obviously, we’ve seen what happened with Taylor Swift. You have to ask at what point are we going to stand up, as a people—fuck politics, our government is not going to do anything about anything. Will we stand up and say: “Wait a minute, this is dangerous?” I mean, it’s one thing to find a cure for cancer using AI, but it’s a different thing to start bringing people back from the dead, like George Carlin, and having Taylor Swift looking like she’s a porn star.

Tom Morello plays the guitar solo on the title track. What was it like working with him?

I love Tom. I’ve known him for years. He is a person who stands up for what he believes in and shows up to causes. He’s just a good dude. We were both inducted at the Rock And Roll Hall





Crow at the 2023 iHeartRadio Music Festival in Las Vegas.

heard, and then all the parameters are off. But also, you've got all this fire in your belly, and all these things you want to write about, because you're watching how it affects your kids.

Despite those heavy themes, it doesn't feel like a doomy record.

Subconsciously I love being able to talk about the reality of being alive – but not make you want to jump out of a window. Even a song like *All I Wanna Do*, which was dressed up with the most fun Stealers-Wheel-meets-Marvin-Gaye [sound], is pretty sardonic. And that's good. It's good to have all things be a part of the trip through the lyric.

Could you have been anything else, in a parallel universe?

I'm not built that way. I love the idea of parallel universes, I'm open to any crazy, cosmic, mind-blowing theory. But I guess one of the reasons I don't think in that context is because I don't feel like I'm very good at anything else. I'm not a great cook. I don't think I'd be a great wife... I get bored too easy.

Who do you think is a great model for a late-period career?

Well, Bonnie Raitt won the biggest award at the Grammys last year. That's a great career. Emmylou

Harris, when she did that Daniel Lanois record [*Wrecking Ball*] and the two records after that, I was just like: "Woman! Your writing now is just incredible." I was like: "Y'all give me hope that there's no reason to stop just because you're over

forty, over fifty, or even over sixty." Touring-wise I'm gonna keep going as long as I can. There is the pitfall of who wants to come see a seventy-year-old woman perform. But people want to see Madonna. So I don't know. I just try not to limit my thinking.

When you look back on your career, have you had some fun?

I've had the most fun. I've had some of the funnest evenings, the funnest early mornings. All of it. I feel like I've had several different lives. Y'know, there was the Hollywood period where I would have tons of parties at my house, with people like Warren Beatty, Jack Nicholson, the Rolling Stones and John Travolta. I look back at

that and I go: "Who was that person?" And now I'm raising two boys, and we laugh and play disco music while we're cooking. That is what I call the infinite possibility of life. 🎵

Evolution is available now via Big Machine.



Crow with her sons Levi (left) and Wyatt at the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame Induction Ceremony in NYC in 2023.

Of Fame this year, so I got to give him a big hug and tell him how much it meant to me. The way he played was his interpretation of what AI looks and feels like. He nailed it. He gave a complete visual and physical feeling of the chaos that will ensue, through his guitar solo. I will be very curious to see if anybody I ever play that song with can nail his guitar solo. I don't think so!

Which other themes came up for you when making this album?

Well, one of the early things I sent Mike was a song called *Broken Record*. Right down the street is where the school shooting happened here in Nashville, and I was quite vocal about how it's time for [stricter] gun legislation. And just the hate, and the death threats, and the vitriol that I received on social media, it was shocking. And that song is a response. I had reached out to a bunch of country artists and said can we get in a room and talk about where we meet. And I got nothing. So that's what *Broken Record* is about. It's like, people who are sending out Christmas cards with their family holding guns. Why would you want to do that? I feel like the whole record is full of questions. Like: who are we?

It's election year in the US. Do you have hope? Errrr... I'm scared. Honestly, there's just so much to fix. My feeling about where we're at – and it's probably true of every country – is that there's too few making too much money. And that's what's running everything. That's what's keeping people down, making people believe in a tyrannical candidate. It's a strange time. It's almost like we don't see the

fact that the people that are making money – that are doing anything to keep the power – are keeping everybody else down.

The intro to *Alarm Clock* almost sounds like a teenage garage-punk band. Why do you think you still haven't mellowed?

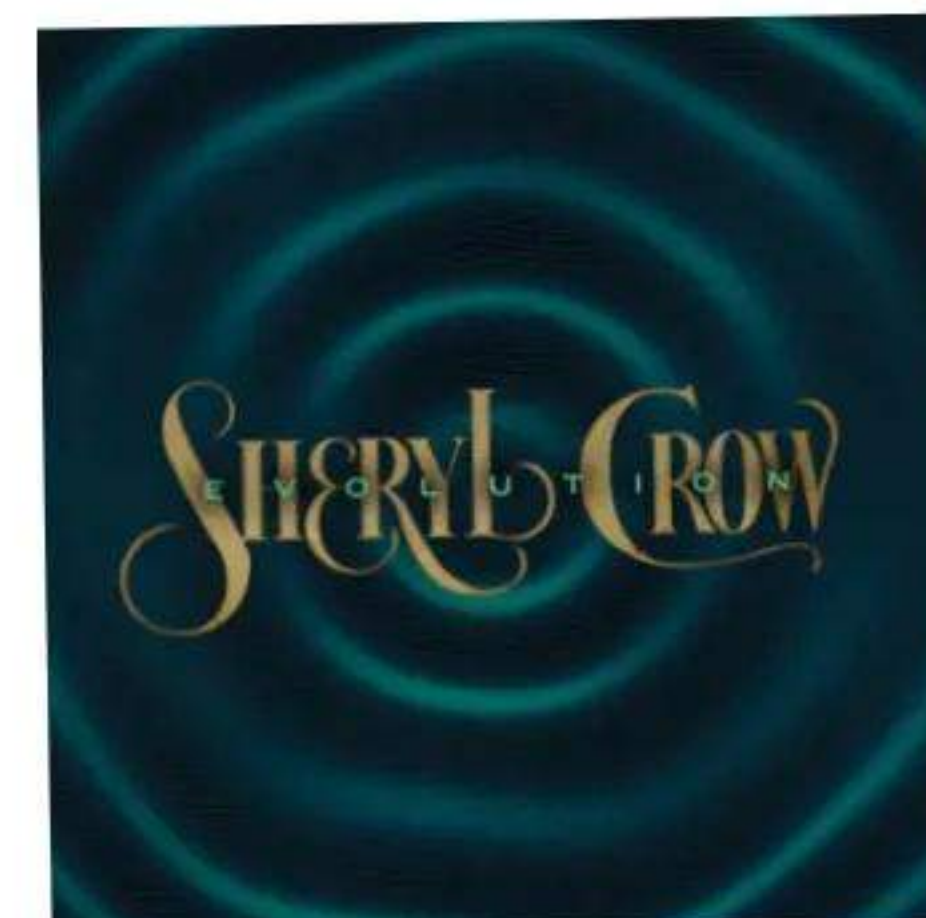
That was a fun day. I said: "I want to write about how I hate my alarm clock, because when it goes

“At the end of your life, I think it's the people and the moments, not the awards.”

off, all that beautiful dreaming about floating on a yacht, y'know, it all stops." Mike banged out this groove and it just fit the song.

One of the beautiful things about making this record was I kinda treated it like a gift that I was giving myself. I didn't have the grinding of teeth that I usually have when I'm producing or tracking myself. This was like a kid in a garage with a bunch of motorcycles, and: "What shall we throw together to make this thing run?"

I've always said that I feel my best work is still in front of me. You have to be able to let go of wanting it to be successful. You reach a certain age, and in this climate, with streaming and everything, you doubt you'll be



WATCHING THE RIVER FLOW

Most thought 1994's *The Division Bell* was **Pink Floyd**'s final statement. But after sifting through surplus material, 20 years later, with a little help from his friends, David Gilmour pulled *The Endless River* out of the hat.

Words: **Daryl Easlea**

It comes from all sorts of ideas," David Gilmour said in 2014, of Pink Floyd's then-new album *The Endless River*. "Some of it is improvised, quite a bit of it is just the two of us, Rick [Wright] and me, or the three of us, improvising together. Some of it is half-written ideas that one of us had come up with, rehearsed and considered as a start point for something."

Those ideas often came about on the Astoria, Gilmour's houseboat moored on the River Thames in West London. It was also there, in 2012, that engineer Andy Jackson, who had worked with Floyd and Gilmour since 1980, learned there was to be a new Pink Floyd album, some 20 years after they had last released fresh material, and after years of Gilmour saying "absolutely, definitely not".

It was no secret that there was a surplus of material from the sessions that produced 1994's *The Division Bell*. Due to the amount, at one point it had been envisaged as a double, with one disc of tracks with vocals and the other built from the instrumental sessions that began at Floyd's Britannia Row studios and continued on the Astoria in early 1993. All featured Gilmour, drummer Nick Mason and keyboard player Rick Wright. The purpose of these sessions was to create ideas for songs.

"After two weeks we had taped an extraordinary collection of riffs, patterns and musical doodles," Nick Mason wrote in his book *Inside Out: A Personal History Of Pink Floyd*. "Some rather similar, some nearly identifiable as old songs of ours, some clearly subliminal reinventions of well-known songs."

From these, around 40 workable ideas emerged. As *The Division Bell* took shape, it became clear that there would be no time to fashion these instrumentals into an album. As a result, the recordings languished.

The Division Bell was released in March 1994, and many thought that it marked the end for Pink Floyd. After the

subsequent tour, while the band never officially disbanded, there was silence on the Floyd front. Then with Wright's passing in 2008, it seemed that Pink Floyd had been laid to rest.

While working on new material on the Astoria in 2012, Gilmour thought about the wealth of unreleased material from *The Division Bell* sessions, and wondered if anything could be done with it. He called up his old friend, Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera, and asked him to have a listen.

With Andy Jackson and long-serving engineer Damon Iddins, Manzanera divided the raw material into four sections, moving parts around.

"In the back of my mind, I like to think conceptually and

contextually, at the same time as picking the bits I like, weighing it all up – all those aspects of a big picture. There were things like Rick playing his Farfisa Compact Duo [organ] that he hadn't played since *Wish You Were Here*, and the sounds that he had used at Pompeii. I thought this sequence would be great with a bit of drums

underneath it, so I took drums from somewhere else and put them under that, and I started to take diabolical liberties – I took a guitar solo from another track, changed the key and put it on another bit of instrumental."

After six weeks, Manzanera had four 14-minute sections, which he shared with Gilmour. "He asked me to play it to Nick, who also thought there was potential. And then... nothing happened for nine months."

At the end of that hiatus, Gilmour still couldn't work out what should happen with these pieces of music. "He felt it needed a bit of a fresh input," Manzanera told us. Gilmour rang up his old acquaintance Youth, a producer and Killing Joke's bassist. He was a huge>

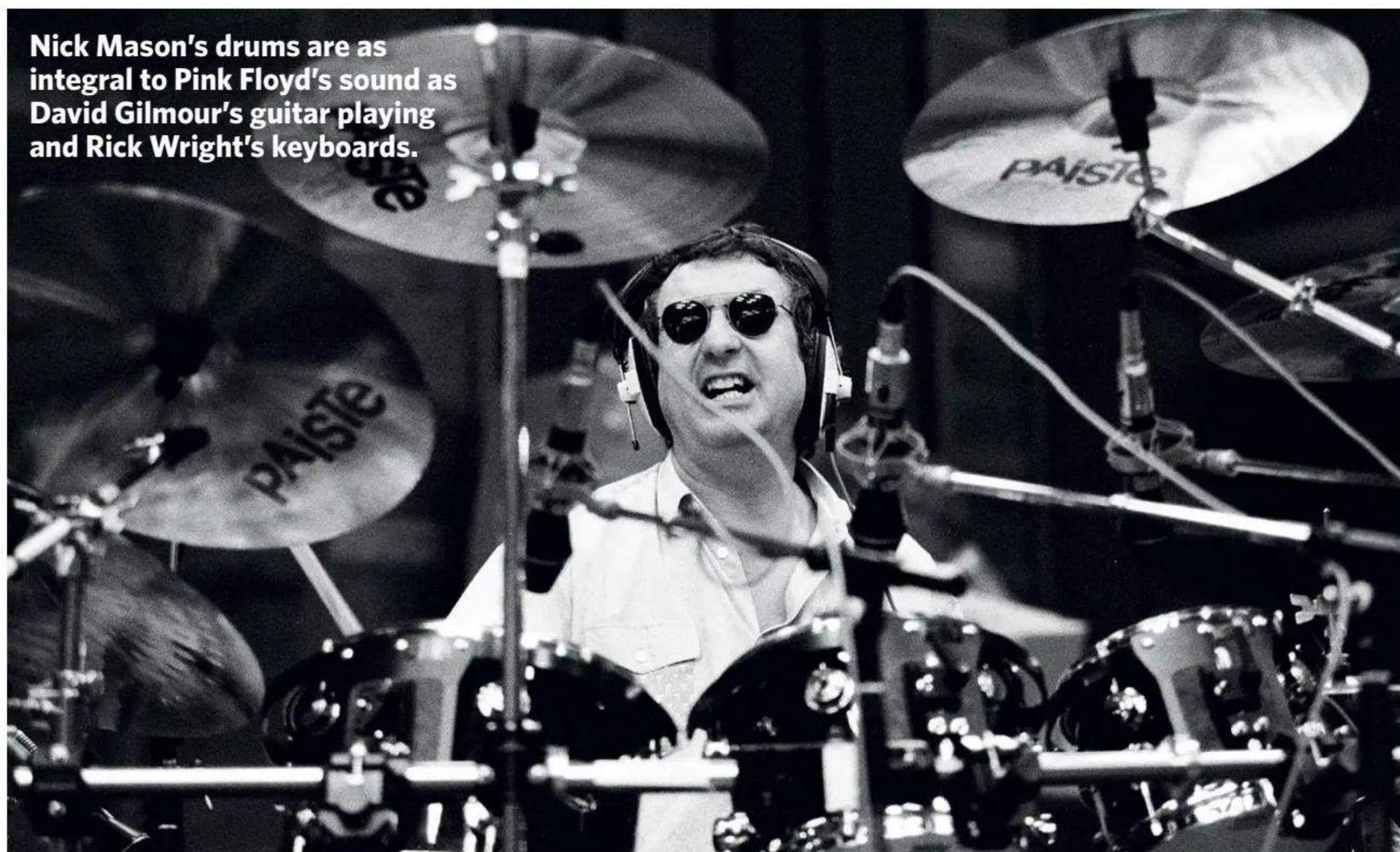
**"After two weeks we had
taped an extraordinary
collection of riffs, patterns
and musical doodles."**

Nick Mason





Key man: the greatly missed Rick Wright.



Nick Mason's drums are as integral to Pink Floyd's sound as David Gilmour's guitar playing and Rick Wright's keyboards.

“David has a unique, fantastic sound – the minute you hear it, you know it’s Pink Floyd.”

Phil Manzanera

Floyd fan as well, and was rumoured to have released some ambient mixes of Floyd’s work to the underground at the time.

Speaking ahead of its eventual release, Youth recalled vividly his first listen to the material: “David asked me to come down to his farmhouse as he wanted to play me something that he was a bit stuck with, to see what I thought. It was a glorious summer’s day. The window was open and I was looking out over this beautiful Arcadian country landscape; swifts were darting in and out of the window, chirping away. David started playing what was the genesis of *The Endless River*. Three or four minutes in, I thought: ‘That’s Rick! This is Floyd.’ I was so blown away that I thought, ‘Whatever the gig is, even if I don’t get it, I’ll never forget this moment.’ I really enjoyed it. At the same time, I could see why David may have felt that it wasn’t right. When it finished, I said: ‘That’s Pink Floyd, isn’t it?’” Gilmour replied simply: “Yes.”

Enthused and honoured to be consulted, Youth suggested he take the pieces away to his studio in Spain to rearrange them, to aid their flow. “My parting words to David were: ‘What’s your real vision on this?’” Youth remembered. “He replied: ‘Make it sound like us.’”

Youth was a student of the group’s work and history and, like Manzanera, wanted to create something that he, as a fan, would want to listen to. Apart from this, he had an outsider’s approach.

“Phil was almost too respectful to the original sessions, which was probably the right and proper thing to do at that time,” Youth suggested. “I had a really fresh perspective. I was a bit younger and cheekier – I went in and radically rearranged it. I might take four bars and turn it into a three-minute piece.”

Youth put some ideas down on bass and guitar on the tracks to illustrate their potential. “It was very risky of me to do that, because I was worried that David might think I had gone too far. But what I’ve learned as a producer is that you have to be true to yourself. Luckily, David really liked it.”

“David gave Youth what is now the first and second part, to see where he could go with that,” Jackson recalled.

“With the first section in particular, he made significant impact, saying it could be massively expanded. He extended it and put a rhythmic basis in it. Because he thought those two pieces should make an album, he

made them enormously long, not realising there were another two. We ended up lobbing out whole chunks.”

Youth was particularly taken with Manzanera’s accompanying information: “It was true prog-style – little flow charts and drawings to illustrate the concepts. I thought this was great. All the elements were juxtaposed to each other. And it wasn’t all ambient, either, there were quite a few rocky and jazzy interludes.”

“Although I only used Pink Floyd bits,” Manzanera said, “Youth made it more obviously Pink Floyd.”

After Youth’s work, everybody listened to the new creation. “And it was then that David took control of the situation,” Manzanera said. “David took the best from Youth’s work and mine. He was then in charge.”

It was this shift in gear that really got the process under way, in November 2013. Gilmour wanted only an embellishment to enhance the material. “A lot of those moments are so lovely, so magic, as they are, that we have just used those and enhanced them a little bit,” he explained.

Operations moved to Gilmour’s studio in Hove. “We headed down there and got Nick to recreate drums and David to add guitar parts,” Andy Jackson recalled. “It became an interactive process after that.”

“It was fun, but it was pretty tough,” Youth added. “Pink Floyd’s criteria is way above the clouds. Attempting to scale that mountain is no quiet endeavour, it’s a huge, epic undertaking.”

“It was great,” Manzanera continued. “There was a lot of new stuff added to the old stuff. Because of the way technology has changed, it makes it something that couldn’t have been done before. It is very much a modern album in that sense, because it does have all the ingredients of analogue recording, of people playing together, but then with today’s computer technology you can completely rearrange it, change the key of it and fashion something that’s very cohesive.”

“Modern technology is a wonderful thing in a recording studio,” Gilmour added, smiling.

“There are ideas there that can be seen in some of the really early albums, in terms of assembly of music, that is not in terms of regular song format,” said Mason. “This record that is primarily instrumental, the obvious interpretation is that it is about music primarily, rather than lyrics.”

Initially, all four producers were involved in the studio, Jackson engineering while Manzanera and Youth would be at the back, giving Gilmour and the other artists – sax player Gilad Atzmon and long-time cohort bassist Guy Pratt both make cameos – feedback and encouragement.

“It wasn’t all plain sailing,” Youth recalled. “We had serious disagreements at times about content, the validity of doing one part or not, but it was undertaken with a lot of integrity.”

Youth spoke of the sessions with childlike wonder. “*Wish You Were Here* is probably my favourite album, certainly the one I’ve bought the most and listened to the most. Actually being in the room with the same instruments and some of the same musicians... I thought [it] would never have





"Hmm... which guitar shall I use?"
David Gilmour during sessions
for *The Division Bell* in 1993.

been possible, never considered it. Or that I'd be in a position to be considered to do anything like that – and then to be doing it is a remarkable, levelling experience. Pink Floyd's production criteria are still the highest yardstick out there – probably only George Martin comes near."

It was soon apparent – although according to all, unspoken – that the album was a tribute to Rick Wright and how much his quiet presence was as much a shaper of Floyd's sound as any of the other parts.

"As we know, lead guitarists can obliterate everybody else with their sound," Manzanera says, laughing. "And, as we know, David has a unique, fantastic sound – the minute you hear it, you know it's Pink Floyd. But having that Rick organ underneath puts it in a wonderful musical context, and the three of them, when they are together, it sounds like Pink Floyd."

"If you were short of a great guitar or drum part, you could do something about that," Jackson said. "But if you were short of a keyboard part, there was nothing that could be done. Bits of Rick became really precious – we would grab them."

Between them, they isolated Wright's Hammond organ and VCS3 synth playing, giving his work prominence. As Youth put it: "It was like an Indiana Jones adventure in a way, playing around with all these references."

One of the most precious sections can be found on *Autumn 68*, its title a lovely, poetic nod to

Wright's *Summer 68* on Floyd's *Atom Heart Mother*. A tape was found of Wright playing the legendary pipe organ at London's Royal Albert Hall ahead of the band's June 1969 show there (after which they were banned for using a smoke bomb). "We've used a minute and a half of the twenty minutes there," Jackson said. "We gave it to Youth and selected a section."

Youth was delighted: "According to David, he [Wright] was playing his *Unfinished Symphony* just after they had finished sound-checking. It was amazing to discover that Rick had composed a symphony."

"I think we have successfully commandeered the best of what there is. I suspect this is it."

David Gilmour on *The Endless River*

One of the most pleasant surprises of *The Endless River*, though, was the rejuvenation of the other Floyd founder member, Nick Mason – which has since continued through his work with his band Nick Mason's Saucerful Of Secrets.

"Nick has been playing a lot recently," Jackson stated at the time. "We came in to do the drum session, and he was completely on it. People underestimate how important Nick is in Pink Floyd. You hear it when someone else plays it; it's just not right. Nick is so effective for this band."

The piece that ties *The Endless River* all together is closer *Louder Than Words*, the sole track on the

album that has vocals, with lyrics written by Gilmour's wife, novelist Polly Samson.

"Polly came up with the idea for *Louder Than Words*," Gilmour explained. "Neither Nick nor I are the most verbal people, so Polly was thinking it was very appropriate for us to express what we do through the music."

"It took David and Polly a long time to get the lyric on it and the vocal," Youth said. "It was only two minutes, so we had to extend it and make it into a song. Nick did the drums again, David did all the guitars. I discussed with David bringing in some R&B backing vocals, with a view to making

it appropriate in the context of what we were doing and that it would make the record sound more like Pink Floyd. David really didn't like the idea of that."

A couple of weeks later, Youth and Durga McBroom, the singer in Youth's dance ensemble Blue Pearl, were writing some new material for Blue Pearl. He told her about the project, and they decided to record some vocals for the track ("After she's picked up her chin from the floor!" Youth says with a laugh), with Youth fully ready to shoulder the blame if Gilmour wasn't happy with such insubordination. "I told Phil and Andy and they went [adopts fearful voice]: 'David's not going to like this – he said he didn't want backing vocals on it. You're going to hear some thunder!'"

Youth sent the tape, then heard nothing from Gilmour for a week or so.





Set the controls: Floyd at Olympic Studios in London in 1993.

“He phoned up about something else, and I eventually asked him what he thought about Durga’s backing vocals,” Youth said. “He replied: ‘Oh yes, I think they’re great – I’ve already sung some other things over them.’ [On the album, McBroom is joined by Sarah Brown and Louise Clare Marshall.] It’s funny with David. You think he’s going to be one way, and then he goes completely the other. He’s unpredictable like that, and that’s good.”

There was a great deal of deliberation about where the song should go on the album. At one point it was at the end of the third section, but all eventually agreed that it made little sense to go back to instrumentals after it, so it was put at the very end. In the end, the back sections of parts three and four were swapped over. “Conceptually, the one song at the end is pretty neat,” Manzanera said, laughing, “pretty good.”

Tinkering with the final mixes went on, but the actual recording has taken less than a year. “It wasn’t actually that long, from beginning to end, for a Floyd album,” Jackson says. “For any other group, it would have been a long process, but for a Floyd album it wasn’t that bad!”

Everyone was delighted. Youth views the project as “a restoration of their sovereignty”.

The news of the existence of *The Endless River* – its title part of the lyrics of *High Hopes*, the final song on *The Division Bell* – went public on July 5, 2014, when Polly Samson matter-of-factly announced it on Twitter, pre-empting a tabloid threat to spill the beans. Youth followed it up the following day on Facebook with his message: “Okay... peak experience number one, producing Pink Floyd.”

The announcement of the track-listing – and 18-year-

old Egyptian artist Ahmed Emad Eldin’s poignant artwork – on September 22 brought Floyd again to the forefront of the world’s media. Gilmour offered his explanation of the project: “When we finished *The Division Bell* sessions, we had many pieces of music, only nine of which had become songs on the album. Now with Rick gone, and with him the chance of ever doing it again, it feels right that these revisited tracks should be made available as part of our repertoire.”

The result is an old-fashioned album that demands your attention and repeated listening. “*The Endless River* is a continuous flow of music

“It wasn’t all plain sailing. We had serious disagreements at times about content, the validity of doing one part or not.”

Youth

that builds gradually over four separate pieces over the fifty-five-odd minutes,” Gilmour told us. “You have to get into the right mood to listen to this. There are lots of people who love to still listen to music that way: listen to the whole thing, the whole piece, all the way through and get really into the mood of the whole thing, rather than listening to shorter pieces, and this is for them, really.”

It’s something that demands your attention in this relentlessly soundbite-driven world.

“It’s like classical music,” Phil Manzanera said. “If you put the effort in, you get it back.”

“Music has got so disposable and functional,” said Andy Jackson. “People put their iPhone on shuffle and it’s something to kill a Tube journey. And people are craving depth. It does demand to be listened to that way [in full].”

As a result, it owes much to the Floyd of between 1968

and 1975, referring often to the majesty of their albums *A Saucerful Of Secrets*, *Ummagumma*, *Meddle* and *Wish You Were Here*. It certainly touches again on their experimental side, which Youth was keen to exploit.

“Even though Floyd were much more blues-based, they still had a very strong affiliation with krautrock, and it was through Rick that they had this European aesthetic with Moogs and the VCS3 – something that Eno was to do to a greater extent around the same time. Floyd touched upon it with *Welcome To The Machine* [on *Wish You Were Here*].”

What you’re left with is something that, despite the sterile, studio-created way it came together, seems bristling with inspiration.

“Pink Floyd have never patronised their audience,” Youth says. “Being true to yourself is more successful than being someone you think you should be. Those cats have got the confidence to do that, and they pull it off very well, I think.”

“Everyone who works in music tends to have a palette that is theirs, and that they use, and they’re never gonna sound like someone else,” Gilmour said.

“David was shrewd enough to realise that Pink Floyd is larger than the people involved,” Youth adds. “With a band like Floyd, the collective energy and spirit is so powerful, you can’t mess with it. It’s got its own magic and power. And so, of course, it continues, and David has managed to ride through all those ups and downs.”

“We’re certainly not going to sound like anyone else. It’s inevitable: the sum is greater than the parts,” Gilmour said.

So, as the *River* flowed, the question on everyone’s mind was: will *The Endless River* really be the last new word from Pink Floyd? Andy Jackson thought so, but as he said at the time:

“I would have said that a couple of years ago. I never thought we would do Live 8. Rick going has made such a big difference.”

Phil Manzanera’s opinion was: “I would have thought so, as Rick’s not there any more. You

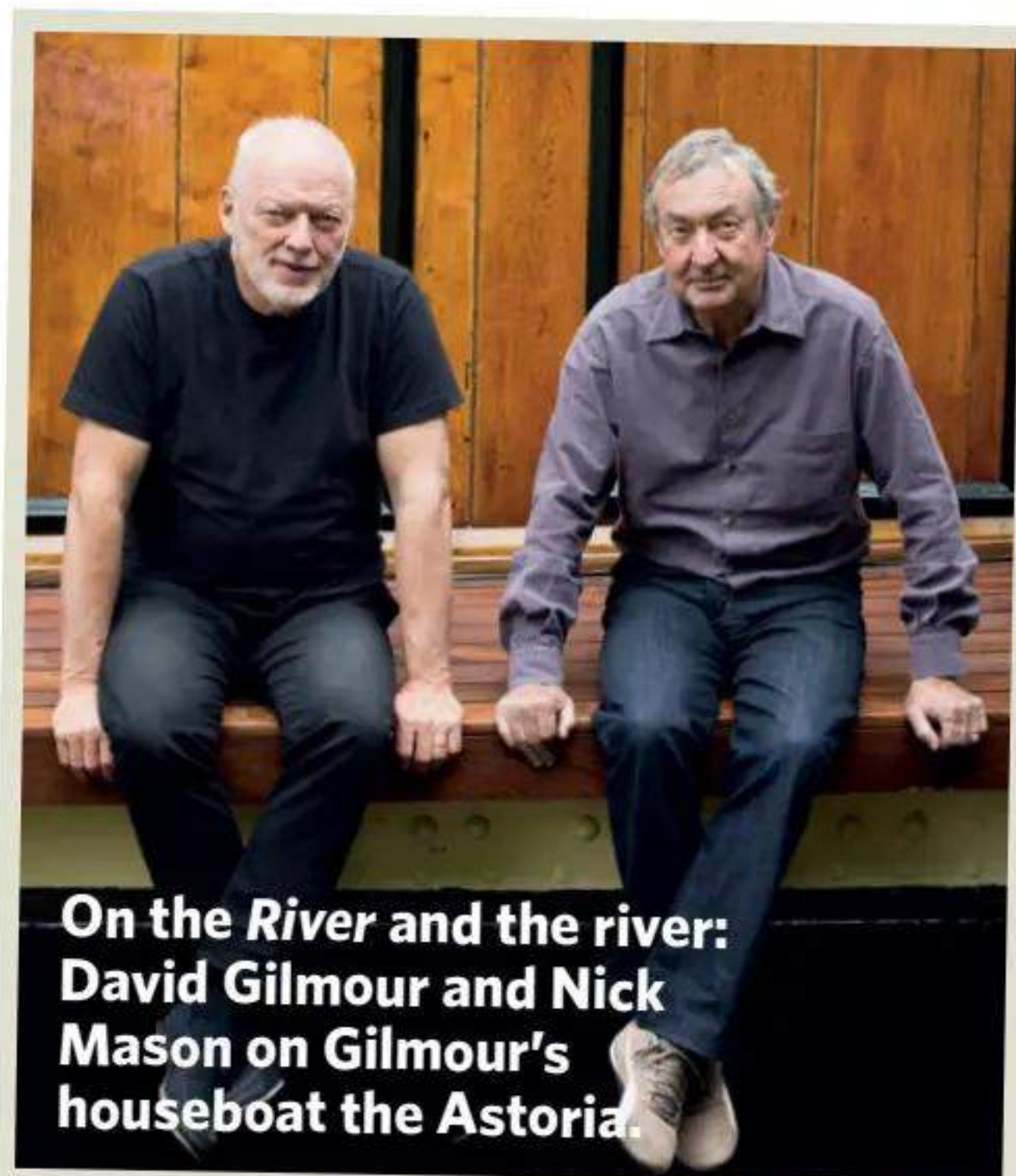
can never say never, but I would have thought their job is done. This would bookend the thing very neatly, as a tribute to Rick. I’d like to think if any of us Roxy Music people ever pegged it, somebody would do a tribute like this for us.”

Youth, on the other hand, didn’t necessarily see it that way. “I don’t give up on the idea that they will tour again in some way or another,” he said. “I’d love to see it, but I doubt it.”

The final word on that question, of course, had to be Gilmour’s, and in 2014 he was unequivocal. “I think we have successfully commandeered the best of what there is. I suspect this is it,” he says of *The Endless River*.

But as time has taught us, that wasn’t quite it. In September 2022 Pink Floyd released a brand new single called *Hey Hey Rise Up*, with all proceeds going to Ukraine Humanitarian Relief. Gilmour and Mason were joined by long-time Pink Floyd bass player Guy Pratt and Nitin Sawhney on keyboards and it featured vocals from Andriy Khlyvnyuk of Ukrainian band Boombox.

Hey Hey Rise Up is probably the last new material that will ever be attached to the band’s name, and, if it is the end – let’s face it, we’ve been here at least twice before... 🕒



On the River and the river: David Gilmour and Nick Mason on Gilmour’s houseboat the Astoria.

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